Interview with Hendrik Van Oss

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

HENDRIK VAN OSS

Interviewed by: Lillian Mullin

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Q: This is an interview with Hendrik Van Oss, a retired Foreign Service Officer, on behalf of the Foreign Affairs Oral History Program. Mr. Van Oss can you tell us something about your background before you entered the Foreign Service?

VAN OSS: I was born July 26, 1917 in Mount Pleasant, Pennsylvania and shortly afterwards moved to Plainfield, New Jersey where I spent most of my childhood and high school days, except for an interlude of five years when my father was employed by Unilever Brothers in The Hague, Holland. We all went to Holland and I went to my first five years of grammar school in The Hague. We returned to the States in 1928 because my father was a naturalized citizen of Dutch origin and was in danger of losing his citizenship because he had been abroad five years. So I spent my early education other than Holland in Plainfield, New Jersey.

After graduating from Plainfield High School (1934), I went to Mercersburg Academy for one year and then to Princeton University, from which I graduated in 1939. I had a couple of years at Columbia University in the Law School.

The war was looming and the draft was approaching and I felt this was not the time to be studying law or anything else so I took leave of absence from Columbia Law School, got

a temporary job with W.R. Grace & Company in New York and looked for work connected with the war effort in Washington. I might add that I was called up for the draft but turned down because I was too nearsighted.

I entered the State Department in June of 1942 in the Division of World Trade and Intelligence (WT), (a regular State Department division, not part of OSS). It had to do with the proclaimed list of block nationals. While in WT, I shifted from economic warfare work to biographic informational work and helped set up the State Department's unit for collecting biographic information on important world figures. We eventually absorbed OSS's biographic record section and became a full fledged Division. I eventually (1944 or '45) became acting chief of that.

I took the written Foreign Service exam in early 1945, the first given after World War II, passed the orals and was appointed, at least nominally, in September, 1945, I believe. I did not actually enter the Service as such until 1948 because I had to carry on with biographic work until a successor could be found.

I was married in 1947 to Anne Burnett, a Louisville, Kentucky belle. Our first post abroad was Shanghai where we arrived in 1948. I served in several posts in Southeast Asia (Saigon and Kuala Lumpur) then went to Vienna for three years and then back to Washington in the Department's Division of Civil Aviation. After this, in 1959, I went to Johns Hopkins' School for Advanced International Studies (SAIS) for a year of African area training and then was assigned to Kampala, Uganda as Consul General. I had several African posts, and was Country Director for Central West African Affairs in Washington for a while. Then I had a year at the Senior Seminar. After that (1965) I went to Wellington, New Zealand as deputy chief of mission and later (1971) to Lourenco Marques, Mozambique as Consul General. I retired from the Foreign Service in mid-1974.

Q: So Lourenco Marques was your last post and you were Consul General there from 1971- 74?

VAN OSS: That is right. That was my swan song.

Q: You went out to Lourenco Marques at the beginning of the end, as it were, of the Portuguese colonialism there.

VAN OSS: Yes, although I don't think any of us thought of it as the beginning of the end, although in retrospect probably we should have. But when I first got there the Portuguese were very firmly in control. The war against Frelimo, the liberation movement, was going quite well for the Portuguese. They had a very dynamic commander-in-chief, General Kaulza de Arriaga, who was quite an interesting and forceful figure. His detractors dubbed him “The Pink Panther.”

At the time I arrived, the liberation movement, Frelimo, was pretty well confined to the northernmost portion of Mozambique. It made claims, of course, to controlling from thirty to fifty percent of the entire country, but so far as I could determine that wasn't the case. Their only area of actual control was in the northern part, the part that coincided more or less with the area inhabited by the Makonde tribe, just south of the Ruvuma River which forms the border between Tanzania and Mozambique.

The Makonde are a very aggressive, talented people who spill over from southern Tanzania into northern Mozambique. Frelimo had the support of, and derived much of its power from the Makonde.

It was not until about mid or perhaps early 1973 that it began to become evident something was going to change. I think we were too close to events to see them clearly at the time, but that is when the beginning of the end for the Portuguese became more evident.

Q: So in 1971 how did the Department prepare you for this post? They apparently did not see the revolution taking off then.

VAN OSS: Speaking of the revolution in Portugal or in Mozambique?

Q: In Mozambique.

VAN OSS: The actual preparation I had for Mozambique was twenty weeks of Portuguese language training at FSI and, of course, the usual briefings. The Department was a “two-headed monster,” if you want to call it that. Portugal was an ally and member of NATO. Portugal, also, was the last remaining colonial power in Africa, unless you consider the governments of Rhodesia and South Africa as colonial. Portugal, the colonial power and our NATO ally, was important in the eyes of the European Bureau of the Department. But Mozambique, as an African country, was under the aegis of the Department's African Bureau, which was interested in the liberation and independence of all African countries. The Department's two Bureaus were unified in wanting to put pressure on Portugal to voluntarily give Mozambique its independence, but differed in timing and in how much pressure to apply.

But there were various other currents that I was being prepared for. One was, of course, Rhodesia which was ruled by a government of white settlers who had taken over from the British and issued a unilateral declaration of independence or UDI. The Department (and the British) were very much opposed to the act, and didn't recognize the UDI Rhodesian government. I was under instructions not to do anything in Mozambique that would imply in any way that the U.S. recognized the UDI government. That led to some interesting developments which I will go into later.

Of course, the African Bureau was very much in favor of Frelimo and was trying to indicate that we supported it at least in theory without offending the Portuguese whom we depended on for bases and landing rights in the Azores and support in various other affairs. You recall that during the Israeli wars the Portuguese gave us landing rights in the Azores and thus helped us supply the Israelis.

So there I was, I had two masters. I was in a Portuguese territory and therefore owed a slight bit of fealty to the European Portuguese Desk and the American Ambassador in Lisbon; but as an African specialist I felt I owed primary loyalty to the Bureau of African Affairs. When I arrived in Mozambique I found that practically all my contacts were either with Portuguese officials or with Mozambiqicans who were loyal to Portugal and used by the Portuguese to show how liberal and multi-racial they were. So all my sources of information on the spot were inspired or controlled in one way or another by the Portuguese. That doesn't mean that I didn't also have black and white contacts who were anti-Portuguese. But the ones who knew what was going on in the battlegrounds and in the bush where the fighting was going on were mainly Portuguese officials.

As a loyal and experienced Foreign Service officer I reported what I heard. I called the shots as I saw them and tried to be as critical as possible. But I had these restrictions of having to be careful about Rhodesia and walking a very narrow path between the Portuguese and the Africans.

Q: In 1971 after you arrived I think the only news report I saw that struck my eye said Hastings Banda visited Mozambique. Was that of any significance?

VAN OSS: Well, the Banda visit was not of all that great importance to me at the time, but it was significant to this extent: Hastings Banda was one of the few African leaders who got along with the Portuguese. In fact, his honorary consul in Mozambique was a man named Jorge Jardim, a prominent, wealthy Portuguese businessman. Jardim was really a very interesting person. For example, he started parachute jumping at the age of fifty. He was a man's man, very conservative and influential. He had very good relations with Africans and, holding the title of Honorary Consul for Malawi, he was Hastings Banda's man in Mozambique. So the visit of Hastings Banda is significant from that point of view. Also, Mozambique's main importance in Africa at that time was as a passage way for goods going to and from Rhodesia, South Africa and Malawi, which is land bound. Nacala, in the northern part of Mozambique, is a potentially very fine, deep water port. It was slated

to become Malawi's access to the ocean. Although Nacala stayed within Mozambique's sovereignty, Malawi was to be allowed to have almost total use of it.

Thus, the Portuguese made a great fuss over Banda but the episode was not all that important. I don't remember much about it now, that is the problem.

Q: In 1972 things continued about the same?

VAN OSS: Yes. I did quite a bit of travelings throughout Mozambique, mostly as a result of Portuguese invitations. General Kaulza de Arriaga knew on which side of the street the sun shone and did his best to keep American representatives briefed. He told us what he wanted us to hear, of course, but through him and through his deputies I was...I actually did this myself, able to arrange for all of us in the Consular Corps to get regular briefings by the Portuguese military authorities. We went over to their headquarters about once every two weeks. We were constantly being invited to go with Kaulza on trips to the north or to the central portion of the country. These trips allowed me to see quite a bit of what was going on.

I can say this, to give just a small tip of the hat to Kaulza, he had trained his men well, had built up their morale. The Portuguese fighting forces were strong and effective. They were not sissies in any sense of the word. Their parachute jumpers were highly trained and included a great number of black troops. At one point later in my tour of duty Kaulza came into ill repute and was fired in effect; I can go into that in greater detail later if you are interested. But once he left, the whole situation changed. Portuguese morale was no longer as high as before and Kaulza's successor was a nonentity whose name I can't even remember now and who was dubbed by Portuguese critics as the “unknown soldier.” He was mainly an administrator and ineffective as a leader in battle. At that point the end of Portuguese rule surely should have been in sight for us.

Q: By that time, the end of 1972 and beginning of 1973, a lot of other countries, Denmark, Brazil, etc. had all announced support for Frelimo and were sending them money.

VAN OSS: This was going on all through my assignment. The Scandinavian countries, in particular, were giving Frelimo support and we were too. Not military support, but we were giving them humanitarian support. The first chief of Frelimo, Edwardo Monlane, was American trained. He had an American wife, a white woman, and was highly regarded by Western countries.

Q: Where was he trained?

VAN OSS: I think Syracuse University but I would have to check on that. He was long dead before I got to Mozambique. Samora Machel was head of Frelimo in my time. Going back a bit to the sources I had, I have frequently been asked why I didn't have any contacts with Frelimo. The reason was that they weren't there. They weren't to be found in any place I was. Later I learned that one of the young black up-and-coming bank assistants we used to know and have lunch with occasionally was, indeed, a hidden member of Frelimo. He eventually became, I think, Minister of Economic Affairs or some comparable job after Frelimo took over the reins. Graca was his first name.

Q: In that period then, 1971-72, Frelimo personnel were not in evidence in Lourenco Marques at all?

VAN OSS: Oh, no. Not only that, if anybody had presented himself to me personally as a Frelimo, I would have had to be very careful because the Portuguese had a very, very thorough Secret Security Office, the DGS, and there was always the possibility that they were trying to test me to see whether I was doing something that was not allowed. That wouldn't have kept me from talking with somebody if I had known that that person was in truth a member of Frelimo. But if he had sort of sneaked up to me on the street, he could have been an agent provocateur, so one had to watch out for that.

Q: The Portuguese were responding to criticisms coming out of the UN, from Scandinavia, from all over the place at this time. Towards the end of 1972 they proclaimed that they were going to have elections or something.

VAN OSS: I don't recall the timing exactly, but I don't think Portugal ever had in mind, during the period while Caetano was still the dictator, of giving their colonies independence. I think what they had in mind was some sort of greater Portuguese commonwealth or Lusitania, thinking in terms of having some affiliation with Brazil as part of that. Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau would all be members of this commonwealth, each with a certain amount of autonomy like the British Commonwealth. I don't think they ever contemplated that Mozambique would be independent on its own. And it was a great talking point with all the Portuguese that the Mozambicanos were actually Portuguese, or at least Portuguese citizens. Their black henchmen...if you were to meet a black teacher at a school and you were there with a Portuguese official, the teacher would hasten to tell you that he was a black Portuguese. This was part of the Portuguese mystique...that they were color blind, had no racial discriminatory tendencies, and intermarried...and I think to a great extent that this was true.

That doesn't mean that for years the Portuguese weren't hard taskmasters, but basically this was based on a master/servant relationship rather than white race/black race distinction. The Portuguese were not like the British who always felt themselves to be a superior class...well perhaps not always, but in the beginning. I don't think the Portuguese had that feeling. Many Portuguese who came over as farmers to Mozambique married black wives and settled there permanently. Through the decades and generations their descendants became indistinguishable from the blacks themselves. But they retained their Portuguese names. To this day there probably are farmers along the Zambezi River area with Portuguese names who are as African looking as any original Mozambicano.

Q: Then in 1973 the Frelimo attacks heated up, attacking trains, etc. and coming closer to Lourenco Marques.

VAN OSS: Yes and no. They never really gained control over any areas other than the northern portion I mentioned before, so far as I could ever discover. In fact, Frelimo propaganda publications we got would display pictures of Frelimo guerrillas marching through the bushes and/or conquering some unnamed village or other, but there was never anyplace you could identify. So it was very difficult to assess the accuracy of their claims.

Q: The Portuguese didn't take you out and show you villages ruined by Frelimo?

VAN OSS: Oh, yes, but not many ruined by Frelimo because they weren't ruining many at that time. Towards the end of 1973, I think it was, again my timing is a bit hazy now, Frelimo raids began to penetrate farther and farther south and were beginning to hit places like the Gorongosa National Park (the game park), which was shelled one time causing a great hassle among tourists. They started to lay ambushes along main roads, but these were all hit and run guerrilla operations. They were not land battles involving seizures of territory.

Q: You said that you recalled during 1973 there were human rights charges against Portugal for torture and the use of napalm against black guerrillas and also at the same time a UN resolution to impose trade sanctions against Portugal.

VAN OSS: Yes. I don't recall the exact incidents. All I can say is that similar allegations were constantly being made. I suppose at one time, probably still to some extent while I was there, violations of human rights did occur. There were a lot of people in jail. The Portuguese Security Service was very strong and thorough.

There were rumors of torture, but many of these were exaggerated by Frelimo propaganda. I am quite safe in saying this because I read a lot of it and the wording

was always quite similar. They frequently described, for example, Portuguese soldiers playing football with the heads of slain African babies and other comparable horrors. It is conceivable to me that somebody at some point in a moment of insanity might do something like that, but it is hardly the sort of thing one would make a practice of doing.

And the Portuguese, as far as I could see...and this was perhaps an eye opener to me because when I first arrived I shared these apprehensions about Portuguese cruelty...were no less humane than the British or the French colonizers, and no more savage in their military actions. I never saw any indication of napalm bombing, and never heard rumors of such that I could give any credit to.

I did hear that at one point...and I think this was in late 1973, in any event it was shortly before Kaulza was fired, dismissed or transferred...there was a massacre of Africans in a village called Wiliamo or something like that. The information which came out was very imprecise. A Bishop said he saw many corpses lying on the ground. Frelimo propaganda claimed hundreds had been killed, the Portuguese apparently acknowledged that dozens were killed. It was not certain whether it was at Portuguese instigation. Sources agreed that uniformed black troops committed the deed, but could not prove whether they were black troops under Portuguese command who had gone wild, whether they were Frelimo guerrillas in Portuguese uniforms, as Portuguese propaganda alleged.

In any event internal machinations in Portugal after the event were such that Kaulza's enemies...General Costa Gomes, to name one, who later on briefly became President of Portugal after the revolution there...managed to oust Kaulza and he was canned. His firing was really the beginning of the end for the Portuguese military effort, and the Frelimo activity gained considerable momentum after that event.

Wiliamo is the only massacre as such that I had any personal knowledge of, and even that was pretty sketchy.

You were asking about Rhodesia and I want to finish one thought I gave very early in this interview. You recall that I had orders not to officially acknowledge the existence of the Rhodesian UDI government. Unfortunately for me whenever the Portuguese invited me and the rest of the Consular Corps to go north with them, they also invited the Rhodesian Consul, whose legitimacy the Portuguese recognized. Unfortunately for me also, our pictures were taken on various occasions by news photographers. In one published shot I was standing near the Rhodesian Consul a couple of paces away, both of us listening intently to Kaulza. Somebody complained about this, I don't remember who, possibly the British in London. The Department asked me about it. I told the Department that if they so instructed, I could refuse to go on trips where Rhodesian officials would be present, but if I did so I would lose many opportunities to see things and to find things out. I certainly was not doing anything on these trips that would cause anybody to believe we were special friends of Rhodesia and I suggested that the Department just forget about it. I was faithfully carrying out my instructions not to have formal contacts with Rhodesian consular officers and if I happened to appear in the same photo shot as a Rhodesian official, so be it.

Q: Sometime during 1973, either a statement or a remark saying that he foresaw freedom for Mozambique and I wondered if anything different was coming out of the Department as a consequence?

VAN OSS: No, I don't think I can connect anything up to that particular speech. The Department was always, as I said before, a two-headed monster. The African Bureau was always putting pressure on the Portuguese to disgorge Mozambique and Angola. The European Desk was always trying to soft pedal it without interfering. I think the Department was pretty consistent in trying to keep some pressure on the Portuguese to give up Mozambique.

Whenever I would chat with a Portuguese I would do my little bit in that direction too. But I had to be a little discreet because I didn't want to antagonize them to the extent that they

closed me out of their information circuit. What I got from them was far more important and interesting than what I would have been able to get if they had been hostile to me.

Q: During this period were you getting good support from the Department?

VAN OSS: Oh, yes. I got very good support from the Department. I am not so sure the African Bureau always felt it was getting good support from me because in my reporting, almost without being conscious of it, I couldn't help but give the Portuguese point of view because that was what was being drummed into me. I thought I was criticizing it and analyzing it and trying to see to what extent it was correct.

And that brings up another subject that I have to treat very tangentially. There was certain information on that area that I was not getting in Mozambique for reasons which I don't think can be discussed in an unclassified tape. I would have to go to places like South Africa, Pretoria or other places to read this stuff. So there were things being heard by people elsewhere that pertained to my area which I didn't know about until sometimes weeks after the event.

I only bring this up because it shows that I had very little means of checking the accuracy of what I was getting from the Portuguese on the spot. If I had been getting the other information currently I could have put the two side by side and then drawn much more accurate inferences from what I was seeing.

Q: Why weren't you getting it? Didn't you have classified communications?

VAN OSS: Yes, but these were things that for reasons I don't think I should get into were not being sent to Mozambique.

Q: What was the size of the Consulate General when you were there?

VAN OSS: I had one other substantive officer in the beginning plus an American administrative officer and two American secretaries. Also, if I remember correctly, about a dozen or fifteen locally employed Mozambican nationals.

Q: You had no consular officer?

VAN OSS: No, but the administrative officer included consular activities in his portfolio.

Q: So there wasn't a lot of consular work then.

VAN OSS: Not very much, but there was a trickle. There was a bit of assisting American nationals who for one reason or another...

Q: Were they tourists?

VAN OSS: Well, tourists who found themselves in trouble for one reason or another. An occasional sailor and that sort of thing. The administrative officer handled most of such cases.

My work was mainly political reporting and I had a very fine assistant, Consul Hugh McDougall, who was later replaced by Randy Reed...both of them were excellent officers...who did most of the economic work and also some of the political work. Most of what we did was to follow closely the course of the insurrection and the liberation war. The economic stuff was largely trying to keep track of sanctions breaking by Rhodesia and that sort of thing.

Q: Just one more consular question before we go on, but probably it didn't come to your attention. Since you did not have much visa work did that mean there were not people fleeing from Mozambique looking for other places to go?

VAN OSS: No, not many that I recall. We gave a bunch of Leader Grants and sponsored student exchanges. But I don't recall ever having a refugee seeking asylum.

Q: The people then seemed satisfied to stay in Mozambique up until that time? There was a time when the Portuguese started leaving in great numbers.

VAN OSS: Ah, the Portuguese. This began to become evident in 1974 or in the latter part of 1973. I can't give you exact timing on this, but the things that should have tipped us off to the fact that the Portuguese were approaching their last stand, were happening in the economic sphere. At one point or another Portugal cut down on subsidies and demanded that Mozambique pull its own weight, pay its own way. At the same time Portuguese goods and manufactured goods began to disappear from shelves in the stores. There began to be shortages in various products. We began to hear complaints from some of our local staff that the Portuguese were going to abandon them. Of course at that point we had no reason to believe this was imminent so we said, “nonsense”. But in retrospect it was beginning to be clear that the place was running down.

The second thing that should have tipped us off more specifically...we knew something was happening but we didn't know how significant it was. There were demonstrations in places like Beira by white Portuguese farmers and businessmen complaining that the army was letting them down, not defending them adequately. This coincided with some of the attacks that Frelimo was beginning to make on Portuguese farms, ambushes on the roads, etc.

This was striking home to Portuguese who up to that point had had little real contact with the war since practically all the fighting had taken place in the north up to now. The Portuguese in the central and southern part of the country never heard a shot fired in anger so far as I could tell. So here suddenly they were being subjected to guerrilla attacks and they didn't like it, so they demonstrated.

The demonstrations had traumatic effect on the Portuguese military. Suddenly they were being blamed for something they felt they had no control over. Their respected leader (Kaulza) had been taken away from them and a nonentity put in charge and they were now being blamed for losing the war. This played a great part in the eventual coup d'etat that took place in Portugal, which, if you recall, was largely inspired by young military officers. So that was another thing we should have spotted as being a harbinger of the end.

Then also there were signs which I couldn't document at the time that morale in the army was beginning to crack. I began to hear more information about corruption in the army...how officers would use food allotments that were supposed to go to their soldiers and sell them and that sort of thing. I couldn't document any of this, these were just rumors that we were hearing.

So in retrospect we should have been alerted late in 1973 that the end was in sight. Up to that point I was convinced that the Portuguese would be able to remain in Mozambique as long as they wanted to stay. And to a certain extent that was still true when they actually left because they were far from being defeated in battle. The military coup d'etat in Portugal had brought young liberal officers into power and they no longer wanted to be bothered with colonial wars overseas, so they stopped them and handed their colonies over to the liberation forces.

Q: How do you account for this economic slowdown, things disappearing from the shelves?

VAN OSS: I think that since merchants and factory owners were no longer subsidized from Portugal, had to pay their own way, they became more cautious. They used up their inventories and didn't order new products.

The whole climate began to change towards the end of 1973. The exact timing is hazy in my mind but the key portent was probably the dismissal of Kaulza. These changes became increasingly apparent after he left.

Q: He was dismissed before the coup d'etat?

VAN OSS: Oh, yes. He was dismissed some time after the middle of 1973. It may have been a little earlier than that.

Q: And the coup d'etat in Lisbon?

VAN OSS: That was in early 1974.

One thing I would like to talk about a little bit more is the Portuguese themselves. As an African specialists I went out to Mozambique with considerable misgivings and with not the greatest appreciation of the Portuguese, to say the least. I thought of them as probably very poor colonists and rather cruel, insignificant people.

I couldn't have been more wrong. I think the Portuguese are a strong and very interesting people with a distinguished past. Whatever they did as colonists in the early days...and I am talking about from 400 years ago up to the 1950's...they probably were no better or worse than any other colonists. But I can say that based on what I saw during my three years in Mozambique they were not very much different from their French and English counterparts at my other African posts, and no less concerned with the welfare of the people they were controlling.

The problem with the Portuguese was that Portugal was the poorest country in Europe and they just didn't have anywhere near the resources to throw into their colonies that Great Britain and France had. I am not trying to denigrate Great Britain and France because they were, I think, good colonizers. But the Portuguese were comparable to them and they tried to educate their subjects. But they didn't try until quite recently to do so. The first black

African to graduate from the University of Lourenco Marques did so in 1972. He was an engineer, if I remember correctly.

The Portuguese culture is a very strong, interesting one. The Portuguese people, as such, are very formal, courteous, conservative, not great humorists, but with a flair. They consider themselves as having a great flair for adventure and doing extraordinary things. And I suppose they do, or at least, did.

The people of Mozambique were not...it wasn't an all black versus white proposition. First of all, as I have already said, the Portuguese intermingled very thoroughly with the blacks and those who had been there for any length of time were almost indistinguishable from the Africans. This was certainly true of the settlers and the old farmers.

As in every other African country, tribalism, or ethnic diversity plays a great part. The Makonde were the main tribe that was supporting Frelimo. There was an even larger tribe residing south of the Makonde called the Makua, who were quite pro-Portugal. It was from the Makua that most of the black troops that fought on the Portuguese side came. But there were many other tribes and I think they all, had they been given their choice, would have chosen to have the Portuguese leave. I don't think any of them were happy to have Portugal control them. But I think many of them recognized that they got certain benefits from Portugal.

Indeed the Portuguese ran a fairly impressive colony. Lourenco Marques was a clean city with high-rise apartment houses. The elevators worked, the police worked, the telephones worked, the streets were relatively clean, etc. And this was true in Beira and other cities as well, up in the central and northern portions of Mozambique. There was a college with a number of African students. There were something on the order of 500,000 to 600,000 African kids in primary and secondary schools...mostly in the Lourenco Marques area...out of a population of about seven million, I think it was at the time. (This population figure may be country wide, I will have to check that out.) But an amazing number were in primary

school, considerably fewer in secondary school and a very few were in the one university. Those few Mozambicans who did have a university degree usually got it abroad.

So the Portuguese as I say did have something to be said for them.

Now, one of the problems was that while my orders from the Department were consistent, I knew there was a great deal of controversy in the Department between the African and European Bureaus as to how much pressure should be put on the Portuguese and how much weight should be given to any given information depending on its source. Of course, whenever I went to the Department's African chiefs of mission conferences, this sort of thing would become evident.

My colleagues in Nairobi or Senegal or places like that, would always advocate putting heavier pressure on the Portuguese and casting our lot in with the Africans. I would say, “Now just a moment, don't go too fast. Don't forget we are dependent on the Portuguese for a number of things. Who are you going to put in the place of the Portuguese when they leave?” At that point it wasn't at all certain that Frelimo had the technical know how to control or run an entire country. They claimed to be in control of vast areas in the country, but, of course, as I have already indicated, if they had control over 10 percent of the country that was probably an exaggeration and they had no government as such in operation. Many Frelimo leaders were in exile. They had some very fine men, some very intelligent people, mostly leftist. It was largely a Marxist organization. I always felt that before you tried to get rid of the Portuguese we should be sure that it was done in such a way that whatever government took their place was not anti-American and did not take action that would be greatly against our interests. So, this was just internal...these were things we had to worry about and decide.

I remember from attending previous African chiefs of mission conferences, that my predecessors in Lourenco Marques had said very much the same thing that I was saying now, although with some differences because it was earlier in the game. And they were

almost taken apart by the Assistant Secretary, who at that time was a very liberal, fine man, but completely and wholeheartedly committed to the black African point of view and who regarded what was going on in Mozambique with the insights that he got from other African countries, which were almost without exception, anti-Portuguese and pro-Frelimo. The exceptions, as I think I mentioned before, were Malawi, South Africa and Rhodesia.

Q: Nobody seemed to worry about the point that you mentioned—how are they going to govern themselves?

VAN OSS: Well, this was very evident at the time of the coup in Portugal. I don't know if it is too early to go into this, but the coup took place on April 25, 1974 and almost immediately everything changed completely. It became quite apparent that the Portuguese were going to leave Mozambique very soon. The press, newspaper people in Lourenco Marques started to report freely. In fact one of my contacts in the press came up to me and said, “You know this is interesting. Here I am, I have spent years trying to get articles published in which we have to guard our language and use all sorts of arcane devices to get our point across without violating censorship rules and being taken off to court. Now, suddenly, the press is free and we don't know how to handle it. We don't know what to say. We can say anything we want, but we have no guidelines.” They found it very difficult to adapt themselves to press freedom.

One point I want to make now is that the coup in Portugal took everybody in Mozambique by surprise. Perhaps it shouldn't have, but it did. It even took Frelimo by surprise. Shortly after the coup, General Costa Gomes, Army Chief of Staff in Portugal, who landed on his feet during this coup...he was Kaulza de Arriaga's great enemy because Kaulza had once blown the whistle on him for attempting a coup d'etat in Portugal years ago, and Costa Gomes never forgave him for that, anyway he came to Lourenco Marques and offered a cease-fire.

In other words Portugal offered Mozambique to Frelimo on a silver platter. Frelimo propaganda right up to that time had been along the lines that everybody should be prepared for a long struggle, which would continue if necessary for 15 years. Suddenly Frelimo was presented with the opportunity to take charge and they weren't prepared for it. They couldn't take over immediately. They had to establish an interim government. I think it took at least a year before they actually took over formally and became the official government, although they were certainly involved in all decisions almost from April 25 on.

At our Consulate General there was a great deal of reporting to be done. Portuguese military information had practically fizzled out and we were finding it difficult to keep in touch with events. Well, right after April 25 we had more than enough to handle. I had indicated my intention of retiring from the Foreign Service, but it was apparent that too much was happening. (I'm a little off on my timing, it wasn't April 25 when it became apparent that things were happening, it was a little bit before then.) I offered to stay on a couple of extra months until my successor, Peter Walker, arrived.

During those two months, from April 1 to May 31, I was busier than I had ever been with the type of reporting that I enjoyed most: analysis of political events that were unfolding, the ability to attend meetings between the Portuguese who were turning over and the representatives of the black community and Frelimo. At that point there was just a plethora of stuff to send in. It was a vital, interesting time. I felt in my element and enjoyed those two months, professionally, about as much as the three previous years put together.

Q: You mentioned a group called GUMO.

VAN OSS: This was really an organization built around a very interesting young woman named Joanna Simao. I have to go back a bit. About eight months before this Portuguese officials began to hint that some great liberal, black Mozambicano was going to appear on the scene. And sure enough, Joanna Simao appeared. She had once been very closely connected with Frelimo and had been, I think, jailed for a time in Portugal. The

Portuguese evidently counted on her to be one of the leading African participants in their plans for eventual turnover of administrative responsibilities to black nationalists and black political figures. She came out to Lourenco Marques and did a lot of talking. She said things nobody had dared to say against the Portuguese and Portuguese rule. She used to come around and speak to me. She wanted to get to the States to make her point. I think, indeed, we did eventually give her a Leader Grant. It became more and more evident as time went on that she was probably in the pay of or in some way beholden to the Portuguese. There was very little question that she had been sponsored by them, but they thought they were being very subtle in the way they were doing it and that nobody would find this out. But it became quite apparent.

Before the coup took place she organized a group called GUMO (Grupo Para O Unidad de Mocambique). This was a group of ex-Frelimo people. Frelimo was not a monolithic structure, there were a lot of opposing elements within the organization. There were forces tangling with each other. In fact, Edwardo Mondlane was murdered by a letter bomb and one of the rumored perpetrators of this foul deed was one of his former companions, Uriah Simango. It was never proved, of course. Frelimo claimed it was the DGS, the Portuguese Secret Service which had sent the bomb. My own feeling was that the DGS probably could have done it much more easily long before then and that while it may have been implicated, I thought the evidence was fairly convincing that some of his opponents in Frelimo were involved also. Don't forget, he had an American wife and was considered to be more moderate than some of them. It is conceivable that some of his compatriots wanted to do away with him. It would have been an extraordinarily stupid thing for the Portuguese to have done, but they may still have done it, I don't know.

So Joanna Simao started this group (GUMO). But as soon as Frelimo came into the picture after the coup, she began to pull back and tried to make up to Frelimo. But they would have nothing to do with her and put her into some form of detention...reeducation I think they called it. That is where she was when I last heard of her which was years ago...ten, twelve years ago. I have no idea what became of her since. But she was a very

impressive young woman. A very good orator. She was obviously somebody who to the Portuguese must have seemed just a gold mine, an ideal person to put in charge and keep under surreptitious control.

Q: Just about that time, while you were still there, there was a report of Frelimo shooting down two Portuguese planes using Soviet surface to air missiles.

VAN OSS: Yes. I don't recall that particular incident, but I do remember that the Portuguese military had air supremacy. They had the only military airplanes in Mozambique. It was a very small air force. I suppose the entire air force was fewer than 50 planes. They had a few jets. Most of the planes were propeller driven trainers. Some of them were Nord Atlas troop carriers which looked a little like smaller editions of our own Hercules aircraft, big bellied transport planes. They used to put jet boosters on the wings so they could take off quickly and steeply, and avoid any ground fire if they happened to be in areas where fighting was taking place. They had a few helicopters as well.

A rumor came in that Frelimo had gotten some SAM 7 missiles—Soviet. We sort of pooh poohed this idea. Then at one point two of our military attach#s from some other country, possibly from Portugal, visited Mozambique and were flown all over the place by the Portuguese. One of my Portuguese contacts told me that a plane flying our military attach#s had been narrowly missed by a SAM and that this was highly confidential. When our attach#s returned they briefed me on the trip, but didn't say anything about a missile. So finally I asked them outright...after all we were on the same side and I felt they should be frank with me as I had been with them. I said, “I have heard from impeccable sources that you were almost hit by a missile.” They were taken aback and said, “How did you know?” I said that I had my sources, and didn't they think they should have told me. We had been worried about SAMs for a long time and it was something that I had to report. There would have been questions asked somewhere along the line if they had reported it and I hadn't.

So Frelimo did have missiles, but not very many of them. I think indeed they did shoot down some planes. You see everything you got was propaganda in a way. You got it from both sides. The Portuguese gave you what they wanted you to know and the Frelimo made similar claims. At one time the Frelimo claimed that they had launched a rocket attack on the runway at the Tet airport in north central Mozambique and had destroyed it. Well it just happened by sheer luck that I landed on that same runway the day after the rocket attack had supposedly taken place. Not only had they not hit the runway, I didn't see any sign of a hole or damage anywhere along the line. I was looking for it having heard the Frelimo announcement on the radio. I eventually heard that some rockets had indeed been launched but that they had hit about a half a mile away from the airfield. But people at home for just a brief moment thought things were really heating up. Well, they weren't.

Q: So at the time that you left Mozambique, the end of May, the first of June, there hadn't been an election?

VAN OSS: No, I don't recall an election. I do recall that the Governor General, Pimentel dos Santos, had left. He resigned. If I remember correctly an air force general or an admiral, some military figure, took over on a temporary basis. They brought in a number of people to take part in an interim government. Then long after I left Frelimo sent in representatives to take charge. Chissano, the present President was then Foreign Minister...he came in and set up an interim government. About a year later Machel marched in and took over with great fanfare. But that was long after my absence.

Q: While you were in Mozambique could you tell us something about the CODELs or visits? You haven't mentioned anyone coming out from the States or the Department.

VAN OSS: Well, we had a fair trickling of VIPs. Congressman Crane came out. Then-Congressman, later Senator John Heinz came out because he was married to a Portuguese woman whose father was a doctor in Lourenco Marques. One of the high

officials in the Nixon Administration came out, I can't remember his name now. I do remember that General Kaulza gave him a Soviet automatic rifle and it was inscribed to him. He kindly left it in my care saying, “Send it to me via pouch, please.” I said, “Well, I'll do my best.” But as it turned out we couldn't get it in the pouch, it was against all rules. We had no way, strangely enough, of getting that blasted weapon back home. So I finally decided that I wouldn't fight the system any longer and I would leave it up to my successor. I put it in the code room and forgot about it. I don't know what happened to it to this day.

The big visit while I was there was that of the National War College. This was quite interesting because, if I remember correctly, the Department didn't want them to go to South Africa because of the apartheid business and there was great pressure to keep them from going there. So the National War College said that they would like to come to Mozambique instead. There was a great hassle about that too because the African Bureau I think was none too pleased. The National War College persisted. The Portuguese got wind of it and were delighted to have them come because what better way of getting across the Portuguese military point of view was there?

So the War College came and let me tell you that for a small office with three or four Americans and a dozen or so nationals to handle a group of 30 odd officers and State Department people was not easy, but we did it. The Portuguese put on a great show, had fine briefings in which they put forth the Portuguese point of view.

The Portuguese line was that their fight against Frelimo was really a fight against communism. Frelimo was a communist organization, they were a part of a communist plot to take over the southern part of Africa. First they were going to get control of Mozambique and Angola and then they were going to aim for South Africa. From there they would hop over to Brazil and get a foothold in Latin America. Then go up through Panama, Mexico and threaten the United States. And that with very little exaggeration was exactly what their line was. They had maps with arrows pointing to all these areas. So the National War College got the big treatment.

Kaulza and his people were most anxious to get the group up north, to Nangade, which is right on the border of Tanzania, right in the middle of the Makonde area and subject to shelling and all that. The Department of State and Defense put their foot down and said no, that it was politically infeasible. I had a very difficult time explaining this to the Portuguese and getting them to accept it. Anyway, they were happy to have the College.

Q: What year was that?

VAN OSS: I think it must have been in late 1972 or early 1973.

Q: Normally the War College tours are in the spring.

VAN OSS: There was a chiefs of mission conference in Addis Ababa right after the War College visit. As the War College group was going to Ethiopia, I hitched a ride with them in their plane. So if you could find out when that chiefs of mission conference was held it would indicate exactly when the War College was in Mocambique.

Incidentally, I might add, it was a great morale booster for the young unattached ladies in the Consulate General, to have the War College there.

Q: Looking back to the country you were serving in at that time you mentioned that you did take a lot of trips and I assume you saw a lot of that large African country. Can you tell us something about it?

VAN OSS: Certainly. Many of the trips I took were on my own, although I usually had to get the assistance of Portuguese authorities in terms of getting accommodations, arranging transportation, etc.

I also took a lot of trips as part of Kaulza's efforts to bring the Consular Corps into the picture. This was all part of Portugal's attempt to gain acceptance and keep us on their side. I remember one of the places he used to love to take us was Nangade, which I think

is the northernmost, or one of the northernmost towns in Mozambique. It was right in the heart of Makonde territory. The Makonde, as I think I told you, was the tribe which supported Frelimo and occupied one of the areas that Frelimo controlled. Nangade was a fortified enclave right in the middle of this Makonde area. It was heavily fortified by the Portuguese. To get in there they would fly a plane in at a very high altitude and then descend in tight circles in order to get down to the air field as quickly as possible without encouraging enemy gun fire. Nangade was frequently under fire from across the river. It was right next to the Ruvuma River which is on the border of Tanzania. It was shelled from across the river, probably from within Tanzania. It was interesting to know that Frelimo had many of its camps in Tanzania. I was lucky because during the several times I visited Nangade no shells were received or sent.

Other trips that I can recall that were especially interesting were visits to the headquarters of the Portuguese armed forces in Nampula, located in the northern part of Mozambique. In Nampula we used to see training exercises by the troops, parachute jumps and things of that sort. I found them quite impressive. The morale of the parachute troopers seemed very high. They were very skilled in their jumping abilities and their training methods seemed very up to date and effective. There were quite a few black troops among them as I recall.

Q: I am interested in what you saw. You did a lot of flying, saw Mozambique from the air. What did the surface look like? Is it at this period of time total forest cover? Was there much devastation?

VAN OSS: No. From the air it was very difficult to see any devastation. In fact, I didn't see too much devastation because there wasn't that much heavy fighting in any part of Mozambique when I was there. The fighting was largely in the north. There is some forestation there, but I would say that Mozambique is largely savannah country and scrub. There are forested areas but it is not rain forest type country. The climate can get hot but it is not bad.

Q: What is the rain fall?

VAN OSS: Good heavens, you are asking me for statistics that I can't remember. There is a monsoon season. There is quite a bit of rain fall. It certainly is not a desert.

Q: What was the main occupation of the tribes or the people living outside of Lourenco Marques? You mentioned farmers, were there a lot of farmers?

VAN OSS: There were some. It is a mixture of all sorts of things. There are a number of towns in that area. The farmers are largely north of Lourenco Marques in farming settlements, many of them in the Limpopo and Zambezi River areas.

Q: The London Times, February 1974, reported something about the movement of Africans into protective villages. Did you know anything about this?

VAN OSS: Oh, yes. This was a tactic which I think the Portuguese had learned from the British and to a certain extent from us in Vietnam. The British had adopted this tactic in Malaya and we did it in Vietnam with our new hamlets. The idea is that you take people who are dispersed throughout wide areas and very vulnerable to terrorist attack or pressure to supply food, etc. and bring them together in protected areas. These areas were surrounded by barbed wire and theoretically had all the facilities...huts, schools for the children, infirmaries, pretty basic. Militia were stationed in each village to protect the villagers. The people were all registered so that any strangers who came in, in theory at least, would be noticeable. I believe the Portuguese had a fair amount of success with this tactic.

“Mad Mike” Calvert visited Mozambique. He had been with Wingate's Raiders in Burma during World War II and in Malaya during the emergency there. He was an expert on guerrilla, jungle warfare. He came to Mozambique to offer his advice to the Portuguese on these protected villages.

The war ended before the Portuguese had a chance to see if these tactics would work. When they started to use protected villages everybody thought the struggle with Frelimo would go on for at least a dozen, twenty, thirty years. If it had, one would have been able to tell whether the protected villages would keep the guerrillas away from the people. I just don't know what the ultimate result was. But I visited a number of them. They were very much like the new villages in Malaya that I had seen some twenty years earlier.

Q: The Portuguese were in Mozambique for a long time. How wide spread was the use of the Portuguese language?

VAN OSS: Oh, extremely wide spread. It was the lingua franca of the country. Like all African countries there are many dialects and languages in Mozambique. They are certainly as different as French is from Spanish or even German. The only language that they all spoke and the language that Frelimo propaganda was written in was Portuguese. It was the same in Uganda: all the politicians spoke English...as they did in India. One of the attributes of colonialism was, I suppose, that it gave large areas a lingua franca they otherwise wouldn't have had.

Q: Tribes were able to speak with each other who ordinarily never would have been able to do so.

VAN OSS: That is right, although Africans are pretty good linguists. The average African who is educated usually speaks a half dozen dialects of one sort or another in addition to the lingua franca. But Portuguese was the language commonly spoken.

Q: It will be interesting to see how long that lasts?

VAN OSS: Oh, I suspect it is still there. I suspect they are speaking Portuguese more than any other single language. English, of course, is I think more and more becoming a world language. There were quite a few English speakers in Mozambique as well.

Q: Do they teach English in the schools?

VAN OSS: I think so, yes.

Q: As well as Portuguese.

VAN OSS: Well, Portuguese was the main language of instruction.

Q: Could you tell us something about missionaries in Mozambique?

VAN OSS: Yes, they were very important. You had, of course, the Catholic missionaries, usually priests of one denomination or another. But the ones I got to know best were the Protestant missionaries who were predominantly American or Swedish. We had some very close friends among the American Methodist missionaries. They had their headquarters right outside Lourenco Marques. But they also had a very fine hospital up in...they called it Chikukwe...quite far up the coast near Inhambane...several hundred miles north of Lourenco Marques. This place had an excellent hospital with skilled American doctors and nurses. I remember being extremely impressed by the fact that one doctor would normally perform as many as 30 hernia operations in one morning. They had hundreds and hundreds of patients...both in and out patients. They also ran a leper village. I believe that hospital is working again now. It ran into very bad times immediately after independence because I think the Frelimo was quite loath at first to rely on foreign medical help.

[end of tape 1]

Q: Today is February 25, 1991 and this is tape 2 of an interview with Hendrik Van Oss, a Foreign Service officer who was in Shanghai in 1948-50. I understand, Mr. Van Oss, that this was your first post.

VAN OSS: Yes, it was our first post abroad. I had been in the Department for six years before that. I was newly married to Anne and we arrived as freshmen knowing nothing about what a post is like. I knew only a little bit about China.

Q: That harbor was and still is an important one on the east coast of Asia. Do you remember whether it was used very much when you were there?

VAN OSS: I don't recall that it was used very much for trading purposes, but don't forget that in 1948 China was in the last stages of a civil war. People weren't sending much in. However, Shanghai, itself, the post, the Consulate General, was a huge post. It was one of our biggest establishments in the world. I think only Paris and London were larger. It had a large economic section, so they must have been covering something. Probably by this time it was mainly what was going on in the rest of China, not so much worried about actual exports from and imports to Shanghai.

Shanghai was an important city. A cosmopolitan city. The Communists later said it was an excrescence or goiter on the body of China proper. It was different from any other Chinese city except that there were a lot of Chinese there, of course. There were also lots and lots of non-Chinese. There were many German Jewish refugees, White-Russian refugees, Iraqi Jewish refugees. It was a polyglot and fast moving city. A naughty city. A wicked city. A busy city.

Q: When you arrived in June 1948 the Nationalists were still there and all their ships were still there in the harbor. In 1949 didn't they withdraw all the ships out of the harbor and take them to Formosa? Do you remember that?

VAN OSS: I think you have to be aware of what it was like. There weren't many ships in Whangpoo River harbor. The harbor was very extensive and from what we saw in the Bund area, there were very few ships that came in. And when they did come in, like the General Gordon, a great to-do was made over it. So there wasn't a big fleet of commercial

vessels just waiting there. Now there may have been in an earlier day, but certainly not in the time we were there.

On the other hand in Soochow Creek there were many, many sampans and other small craft with people living on them and things like that. But big ocean going vessels, there weren't very many. There were ferries that went across the river harbor.

Q: There were French and British zones I understand. Were they north of the city near the race course?

VAN OSS: Well, it is hard to remember. As I recall the old city north of the international city, which is where we had our offices and most of the large buildings and banks were, there was a French section and a British section.

Q: I have put the two race courses up here (pointing to a map of the city). I thought that might pin point something.

VAN OSS: Well, all I know is that we used to go to the race course and to get to where we lived we went past the race course on Bubbling Well road, but I would have thought it was more to the west.

Q: So you arrived in Shanghai in June 1948. The Nationalist hadn't left. What was your assignment?

VAN OSS: I was in the political section. I was a vice consul, third secretary...probably the only one in the Service at that time. My boss was a China hand named A. Sabin Chase who was pretty fluent in Chinese. There were several other people in the section besides myself including Fern Cavender, who was a staff officer doing political work. I can very well remember arriving in Shanghai on the President Cleveland, getting off on a crowded dock. There were no long lines or efficient treatment of passengers. You just got off the boat, made your way through a throng of people to the gate. As you had been warned

you kept one hand on your wallet and the other hand on your wife and made your way as best you could. Everything was in great confusion, there was lots of noise. It was quite an experience.

Q: You mean there was no one to meet you at the dock?

VAN OSS: There was but you had to get through that initial throng to get to the place where they were waiting for you. We made it.

Q: Weren't you quite the envy of your colleagues in Washington going to such a romantic place?

VAN OSS: Oh, I don't know. I think they pitied me, thinking we would get killed in the war that was going on.

Q: You didn't have any Chinese language?

VAN OSS: No, but I had applied to be a Chinese language officer and had been accepted as such. But since I had already spent six years in the Department it was felt that I should get going on my so-called career. They told me I could take up the language in Shanghai after I got there. Well I did. I started studying it and got a couple of hundred words under my belt and then I was sent on a temporary assignment to Seoul, South Korea, to help gather documentation, microfilm documents, and other reference material in the government prior to the turning over of control by the U.S. occupying forces to the first South Korean independent government in August, 1948. I was part of a team of four persons. My job was to handle the biographic material. So I spent about six weeks there (Korea) right in the beginning of my tour in Shanghai.

When I got back to Shanghai I found that I had contracted hepatitis in Korea so I spent another six weeks or so in the American military hospital. By the time I got out of the hospital all hell was breaking loose. The Communists were advancing. They had taken

Peking and were advancing down towards the Yangtze River and Nanking, which was then the capital of the Nationalist government. A lot of wives were being sent home from the Consulate General. Fortunately for me, Anne was working for the military attach#, so she was allowed to remain. But many people began to leave Shanghai at that time.

So really there was no chance to study the language properly, and I couldn't devote much time to it. Besides many people spoke English.

Q: You were reporting...?

VAN OSS: We were reporting the news of the progress, or lack thereof, of the war as we saw it from Shanghai. Of course there was a big political reporting section in our embassy in Nanking. And we had posts in Hangzhou, Mukden, Tientsin, Tsingtao and Peking, and all of them were reporting too. Peking fell just about that time. So we knew pretty much what to expect. In other words the Department was not dependent on Shanghai for everything it learned about what was going on in China. But I dare say we reported just about as much as anybody else.

Q: Do you recall anything particularly that you were assigned to? I am just trying to get a picture of what a junior officer would be given.

VAN OSS: Yes. It is a little difficult to say. I did a number of things. First of all I handled all the biographic stuff because that was what I had done in the Department. I was the so-called “expert”. Then I was the main liaison with what they called the Third Force...the liberal non-communist Chinese who we hoped would be friendly to us and a bridge between what we thought even then certainly would become a Communist government and the United States.

There was one fellow, Carson Chang, for example, who was the chairman of one of these third parties. He was an old man, a scholar. I remember his house was just filled with

books. The rooms were like the stacks in a library. You had to weave your way between shelves of books. I used to go to see him and get his views on what was happening.

There was another liberal leader, Lo Lung-chi, who had tuberculosis. We were keeping him alive by sending him antibiotics. He was kept under detention by the Nationalist government in a hospital and we would visit him from time to time to deliver the antibiotics and find out what was going on with him.

Also I was protocol officer. John Cabot, the Consul General, appointed me protocol officer. That meant that I had to arrange the seating at tables for his parties. I had to meet people who were not quite important enough for him to meet but important enough so that somebody had to meet them. One of the things that I had to do was whenever Ambassador Leighton Stuart came down from Nanking I had to escort him back to the plane when he left. He came down quite frequently. He was a delightful old gentleman, a scholar and as you probably know a former president of one of the colleges in Peking (Yenching University). He probably knew as much about China as any man alive. So I got to know him reasonably well.

The other job I had to do was take care of Japanese repatriation. The Japanese who were either living in Shanghai or had been caught in Shanghai were being repatriated on a systematic basis back to Japan.

Q: Who was paying for that?

VAN OSS: Well, I guess we were to some extent. We were still very much in control of things in Japan. General MacArthur and his retinue ran the country. The repatriation was quite interesting because it was something I really didn't know much about. I would be in my office and a Japanese would arrive with a long list of names of candidates for repatriation that he would hand to me for approval. I would look at the list very studiously for as long as I thought was decent and then I would give my approval and he would leave.

Then the listed Japanese would be shipped out on some ship that would take them back to Japan.

The most interesting development in that connection, and this was something that nobody else paid any attention to...as the Communists came closer to Shanghai there was a great deal of concern as to what should be done with Japanese prisoners of war. There was a prisoner of war camp right outside Shanghai which had all sorts of interesting people in it, including General Onama (commander of Japanese land forces in China) if I remember his name correctly, and a number of admirals. The whole command structure of the Japanese army and navy that had been left in China after the close of the war. So this became quite a negotiation. General MacArthur sent a Colonel and a troop ship to pick these people up. I had to take the Colonel out to the prison camp and help him negotiate the prisoners' release with the Chinese general in charge. One of the important problems was that Onama and some of the higher ranking Japanese had been tried in a Chinese court for war crimes, and had recently been acquitted so legally they were no longer prisoners of war, even though they were still in the prisoner of war camp because there was no way to get rid of them. The Colonel said he had been given orders to pick up the prisoners of war and nothing had been said about people who were not prisoners of war. He was not quite sure whether he was authorized to take them. The Chinese General was involved in this and thought they should be included. I expressed the view that it would be very difficult if they were still here if and when there was a change of governments as might happen soon. I suggested to the Colonel that he cable his superiors in Japan and check this out. He did so, indicating that the Consul (he promoted me) strongly recommended that the acquitted officers be taken along with the real prisoners. Of course, MacArthur was smart enough to see that this was the thing to do and agreed.

Another interesting thing was that one of the Japanese generals had suffered a stroke and was very seriously ill. One of the diplomats among the prisoners said that he thought we might lose him if we transported him out of his bed. We arranged for an ambulance to come and pick him up. We had to transport all of these people from the prison to the ship

before dawn because we didn't know what the reaction of the crowds in Shanghai would be when we appeared with a lot of ex-Japanese prisoners of war.

Q: They would recognize them?

VAN OSS: Oh, they would know they were Japanese, yes. For all we knew they might attack them. We didn't have any soldiers as escort for protection. So we got some huge trucks and buses and drove them out of the prison while it was still dark. The Japanese command structure was still very much in evidence in the prison. The generals had their aides who carried their luggage. They had furniture, baggage, and quite a lot of possessions. It was like a tour. The prisoners and their belongings were all loaded on the trucks and I remember asking the Chinese General, “Have you any lists of names? Aren't you afraid that some one might be left behind?” He laughed and said, “Don't worry about that, they'll all be on those buses.”

We got them out at dawn and over to the dockside. They were all lined up on the dock. The generals were very old men, I was surprised how old they were. They must have been in their sixties-sixties—to me then that was old. They seemed feeble. They were taken on board. But all the others were lined up and had to go through the degrading experience of being sprayed for vermin, lice, etc. Then they were taken on board. I can remember that an American Brigadier General, whose name I have forgotten, came up to me and asked if General Onama was part of the group. I said that he was and was already on board. The American General said he wanted to go on board and shake Onama's hand because he was a fine soldier. So he did.

That was an interesting little episode as part of my duties.

It is a bit harder to talk about the political reporting because this was the sort of thing that the newspapers were doing. One thing of interest was that we were worried what would happen when the Communists came and took over the city. Mind you, I don't want to go into all the business of whether the Communists would win or lose because this was

much more of an issue at home in the U.S. than it was in China. Over there there was no question about the fact that the Communists were winning. The arms and materials we were sending to support the Nationalists were being wasted. They were given to troops which eventually surrendered with all their weapons, so the Communists probably had more of our stuff than the Nationalists had.

So it was quite evident from the time I arrived that it was just a question of a few months. It wasn't just I who felt that way. It was evident to all of us including the Consul General. Of course we had to be a little careful how we expressed this view because there was a very powerful China lobby at home and a number of U.S. Congressmen were very much interested and very strong supporters of Chiang Kai-shek and the Nationalists. We couldn't just make it appear that we were selling him short. So we couldn't report as frankly as I am talking to you, although it was quite evident that we found ways of expressing our views that were more acceptable than these words would have been then.

We were worried about what would happen in the interim between the time that Chiang Kai-shek left and pulled out his troops from Shanghai and the time that the Communists came in. The specter that hovered over our heads was the thought that the Chinese in the old city, all the Chinese poor people and everybody would rise up and plunder the wealthier parts of the city. We were all issued carbines. It was a worry.

So a lot of what Sabin Chase and I were doing was trying to make contact with forces in Shanghai that would be able to exercise some form of control. This was expected to be just a matter of security for a day or a few days at most. We didn't expect that the turnover process would be lengthy. Sabin did most of this work because he spoke fluent Chinese and I did not. I did a lot of the reporting. He formed a contact with a Chinese Colonel who had close contacts with the so-called Red Gang of Shanghai.

To go back a bit...it is quite well known that there were secret societies in Shanghai generally referred to as the Triad. The most powerful group was called the Green Gang,

and that was headed by a person called Tu Yueh-shun, a mysterious figure who controlled crime, drugs, the underground, and who was one of the powers behind the political scene in Shanghai. A sort of “godfather”. He was also close to Chiang Kai-shek and his henchmen. There was a rival underground group which we called the Red Gang. I can't remember the name of its leader. But the Colonel whom Sabin Chase had contacted was in deep with the Red Gang leader and we arranged through him after a long process of negotiation that the Red Gang would take over and have its men out to keep things under control, prevent rioting, etc. Also, very important was the fact that Lo Lung-chi, whom I mentioned before, needed special protection. We felt that his life was in danger because he was under “protective” care by the Kuomintang. He was confined to a hospital room and the KMT had by this time put a companion in with him, an army officer who was supposed to keep an eye on him at all times. In fact we went up to see Lo while the army officer was there, just to see that he was all right and show the KMT and the army that the American Consulate General was interested in Lo's well being. We were worried lest in the final flurries of pulling out the KMT authorities would start shooting and kill him along with other opposition leaders. They actually did kill some people. People were shot on the street in the last moments of departure.

As it turned out the turnover was relatively quiet. The Nationalist Army and the police pulled out. The city was very quiet. The next morning the Communists came in. The only fighting that took place was between the Communists and the Nationalists at the point of embarkation where the Nationalists were getting on ships to retreat to Formosa. Lo Lung-chi was rescued, I presume, by the Red Gang because I have a picture of Sabin Chase, myself, Lo Lung-chi, the Red Gang leader, the Colonel and various other Chinese, all standing in somebody's garden celebrating Lo's safe escape. He was a very important man and later became a minister in the Communist government.

Lo Lung-chi was not a Communist; like Carson Chung he was a member of the Third Force we were courting hoping that they would remain friendly to us. When the Communists first took over they set up a coalition government. They obviously had their

Communist hierarchy but they also appointed people like Lo Lung-chi and various other liberals. Lo Lung-chi was made minister of cultural affairs or something like that. Then when Mao Zedong years later encouraged criticism by suggesting that 100 flowers should bloom, Lo Lung-chi was one of the “flowers” who bloomed. He didn't have his bloom cut off, but he was ejected from the government and that was the last I or anyone else I know of heard of him.

The end of all this was typically Chinese. I think it was about the 23rd of May when the Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek held a “victory” march in which he paraded all his troops through the streets of Shanghai with their weapons. There were dancers, bands and all sorts of noise makers. It was called a victory march.

Q: You mean Chiang had a victory march in May of 1949?

VAN OSS: Yes, on May 23, one or two days before the Communists entered. So he had his face saving victory march and then pulled out. That night, the night after the victory march, we saw the police...the police station was right down the road from our apartment house which was right across the street from city hall...we saw trucks loading files and driving off into the distance. The next morning we got up and had breakfast as usual. It was very, very quiet in the city. Doug Foreman, a young language officer who had come in from some other post in China...a lot of our diplomatic personnel were leaving China at the time and going out through Shanghai so this was a collection point for people from other posts and Doug Foreman was among them, living in the apartment above ours in Hamilton House.

He and I decided to go down to the office, about a fifteen minute walk. We started walking down the street and heard a call. Anne was calling us from our balcony which was about eight floors up. She said, “Come back, there is shooting around the Consulate and they don't want anybody going to work.” So we came back and went out on our balcony. Our apartment building (Hamilton House) was on one side of a square. On the other three

sides of the square were the Metropole Hotel, the building that formerly housed our Consulate General, and the city hall, so it was an important square. The Nationalists had put a sandbag fortification right in the middle of the square, where the cross streets met. There were still some police manning that. We were looking over the wall of our balcony and saw some figures coming down one of the streets from a great distance. As they got closer we could see that they were armed and very much on guard, looking from side to side with guns at the ready. One man was unwinding a big spool of wire as he was coming along...this was for communications, not explosives. They didn't know what they were facing. They didn't realize that this part of the city was theirs for the taking.

They came to the sandbag barricade in the crossroads and lined up on all sides leveling their weapons at it. At a signal they ran over it, took the policeman into custody and disarmed him. Then they realized that they were home free and sort of relaxed. By that time a lot of bystanders had appeared on the scene, and the newly arrived Communist soldiers started to harangue the crowd.

That was the takeover. The only dangerous part was that shooting was still going on close to the Consulate General office which was quite near the point in the harbor at which Nationalist forces were boarding ships in retreat. I think about 30 bullets penetrated the Consulate, but nobody was hurt or injured in any way. The closest person to being injured was Doug Foreman and that was the night or day before. In the weeks before the takeover there was a lot of shelling going on and a lot of military activity. The Communists were advancing steadily and at night you could see explosions on the horizon. Very foolishly we used to go up onto the roof of our building and watch the tracer bullets and explosions in the distance.

Q: Like Baghdad today?

VAN OSS: Yes, very much like Baghdad today. In fact exactly like it except the explosives were not quite as big. On one of the last mornings I remember being wakened by several

very loud explosions. Things that just rattled the windows and the bed. I thought we were being shelled. I got up, got my binoculars and tried to find a safe place on the roof to see what was going on. I saw that the Nationalists had blown up the docks, or some installations at the docks, possibly some ammunition dumps.

Towards the end we were on our balcony when we heard a bullet hit our building right up above us. A few seconds later Doug Foreman came down looking rather sheepish and bleeding from a number of little cuts on his chin. He had been standing by the window in the apartment above us and this bullet had hit the metal rim of his window and had shattered the glass. Tiny pieces of glass had cut his chin. That was the one casualty we suffered.

Q: How long did the fighting around the Consulate last?

VAN OSS: The fighting took about a day and a half, maybe less. But we were open for business, so-called, after that. You see, when I say we were “open for business” that is a euphemism because the U.S. government did not immediately jump to recognize the new state of affairs. Since we didn't recognize them, the Communist Chinese did not recognize us. We were no longer members of the American Consulate General, we were simply American citizens. While various things happened that made it necessary for us to contact Chinese Communist officials they never acknowledged that we were doing so in an official capacity. They would always ask, “Why are you complaining about so and so, why doesn't he come and complain himself.” And we would say, “Because we are members of the American Consulate General and part of our job is to protect American citizens.” They would reply, “Well, we will take note of what you say as American citizens and will take whatever action we see fit.”

Q: Did they try to get you to leave?

VAN OSS: No, indeed. They were simply trying to put pressure on us to recognize them. If we didn't recognize them we had no business to transact with them.

Q: So they were well aware of what was going on in Washington?

VAN OSS: Oh, of course. They knew it and we knew that they knew it. This was all part of the game. We held on to our rights to the best of our ability, but we really didn't have any rights.

Q: But you said a lot of our officers had already left other posts. Did we actually close any other posts?

VAN OSS: Yes. We closed Hangzhou...

Q: When did we close them, as the Communists came through?

VAN OSS: Yes, when the Communists came through. As I recall, the Communists were bombing Hangzhou as one Consul left that city. In fact, I think one of the bombs came close to hitting his ship on the river.

We had problems in Mukden. Angus Ward, who was our Consul General in Mukden was put in jail for allegedly striking a Chinese citizen.

Q: Didn't he take his two dogs to jail with him?

VAN OSS: I would not be surprised if he tried. He was a character. His wife was there too if I remember.

Q: But we were not planning to close Shanghai?

VAN OSS: As of the moment we are talking about—May, 1949—we still hoped, I think, that we could find some way of making contact with the new government, and seeing if

we couldn't repair relations. We had hoped that for a long time but as the Communists advanced Mao Zedong had become increasingly anti-American in his pronouncements. One of their big slogans was “leaning to one side.” This meant leaning towards the Soviets; that became a big thing with them.

We expected to be open for business and we proceeded on that basis. We tried to make contacts with the Communists but really didn't succeed. Then at some point around November, 1949, the Communists took over our Marine Barracks in Peking. The Marine Barracks had been awarded to us as a result of the treaty at the end of the Boxer Rebellion so we considered it American property. Our government issued a general ultimatum that either we would keep our property and our rights should be respected, or we would have no recourse but to withdraw all of our diplomatic and consular personnel. Of course the Communists had no intentions of giving the Barracks back and didn't, so we announced around December that we would withdraw our people.

From that time on just about all of our activities were related to closing down the Consulate General and arranging for our evacuation. We also announced to all American citizens in China that the bell had now rung and if they wanted to leave China we would take them out with us. Once we were gone we couldn't guarantee the safety of or be responsible for any Americans remaining in China. We couldn't answer for what might happen to them afterwards.

Some of the missionaries announced to us they would stay. One of the things that I had to do was to help wrap up the USIS operation. There were a lot of books and information materials that I had to dispose of, including the USIS library. We turned most of the books over to the missionaries. They were just delighted to have them. As things turned out they too had to leave eventually. This was after I had left so I don't know much about their circumstances.

The business of trying to leave certainly was not easy because as American citizens, not as official personnel, we has to obey all regulations. And these were incredibly complicated. First of all you had to get an exit permit. To get an exit permit you had to have a residence permit. To get the residence permit you had to go and stand in line and get it...

Q: In person?

VAN OSS: Oh yes. Before this all you did was send one of the Chinese local staff down and they did everything for you. But this was where I learned to carry a paperback book with me wherever I went. Standing in line I got a lot of reading done. Once you got your exit permit you had to put an advertisement in the paper stating that you were going to leave on such and such a date. You had to have an exact departure date. This advertisement was supposed to indicate to anybody who had any claim whatsoever on you that you were going to leave and that you would settle all claims.

Now this wasn't as easy as it sounded because a lot of servants held their masters up and forced them to pay a year's separation pay and so on. A lot of the businessmen were being very brutally treated by their labor force. Kept awake all night bargaining, etc.

Fortunately we didn't have that trouble because we were on good terms with our cook and amah and gave them as much as we could...a lot of foodstuff and clothing...so they left relatively happy and they were decent enough not to hold us up for ransom. And a lot of others had similar relationships. But many of the businessmen and people who had been in Shanghai for a long time did not.

If the ship, or whatever it was we hoped to go out on, didn't arrive, then we had to redo the whole business every month. So we had to go through roughly the same procedure on a monthly basis. This was a not too interesting and rather painful process.

Q: How did you get a departure date?

VAN OSS: Well now this was another laborious process. It wasn't very easy because the Nationalists had imposed a naval blockade on Shanghai and were bombing Shanghai in a rather desultory fashion. They would send a plane or two over every day and drop one or two or five or six bombs. They had armed ships out beyond the harbor entrance to enforce the blockage. And, what was worst in our eyes, was that our own government didn't want to break the blockade even to help get us out. They were on the side of the Nationalists. We were sort of annoyed. We felt that our lives and welfare should have been uppermost in our government's mind and that it should have insisted that an evacuation ship be allowed to enter.

Well at one point we arranged for an old LST to come into Shanghai harbor, but somebody pointed out in one of the Shanghai newspapers that this was really a U.S. military vessel so the Communist officials said that they could not allow a military vessel to enter the sacred waters of China. So that plan was shot down.

Finally we worked out, after a long hard negotiation, a scheme whereby we were to go by train to Tientsin, leave Tientsin harbor by barge which would take us out over the bar where we would transfer from the barge to the General Gordon. That was quite an adventure. The exodus finally took place in April, 1950. We, the remnants of the Shanghai Consulate General, the Embassy in Nanking and one or two other posts, plus several hundred other American residents all descended on Tientsin by train.

This train trip was really some experience. We were in a first class parlor car with a table between every two seats. Anne and I were on one side of a table and Leonard and Helen Bacon were opposite us. There might have been two or three berths made up in the car which were used by some of the children. There was no water in the car and the toilet broke down. We had to go to another car to use the toilet, which was the oriental bomb-

sight type which I am sure you are familiar with. If you aren't, there is nothing to sit on, it is just a hole in the floor.

The water eventually came back on but was apparently the only water on the whole train so Chinese and others from other cars would troop through our car in long lines to get water. The trip took about 48 hours so we had to spend two nights on the train.

I remember one night I let Anne sleep on our seat while I slept on top of some luggage in the baggage room. Leonard Bacon delighted himself by finding a ladder which he put on the aisle floor to keep himself up from the filth, and slept on that. General Soule, our military attach#, slept standing up, giving his wife and daughter his seat.

Eventually we arrived in Tientsin and spent a couple of days there doing all sorts of chores including getting exit permits, having all our papers examined and our jewelry checked through customs, etc.

Q: Was there a hotel?

VAN OSS: Oh yes, there were hotels. This was no problem. Once we were in Tientsin we thought we were through free. But on our final morning we were gathered on the dock side with all the others and everybody was searched. Some women were taken into barge cabins, and were strip searched. We later found out that they were suspected of smuggling out jewelry. I was very nervous because I was not going to stand for that happening to Anne. I had made up my mind if it came to that I would raise as much hell as I could, diplomat or not. But fortunately it didn't happen. In fact we inflicted more damage on the Chinese than they did on us because we had a dachshund named Bao-Tse which we were taking out with us. He was in a little cage. The customs man ordered us to open the cage. We opened the cage; he struck his finger in and Bao Tse tried to take a nip out of it but fortunately missed. That gave us a great deal of satisfaction.

Anyway we got on the lighter and barges eventually. I remember at the last minute when we were all just about ready to embark there was a great commotion outside the gate to the dock. A man appeared who shouted in English that he was an American. He said, “They won't let me out. Take me with you.” There was nothing we could do. Somebody went over to see who he was, but the Chinese authorities took him in charge. He made a great fuss and eventually they led him away. He had his hands handcuffed and he raised them over his head so that we could see what had happened. I never did find out who it was, although somebody must have. One of the Chinese officials in the very calm, super-quiet manner that Communist authorities adapt when they know they are in control said, “You mustn't worry about him, we will take care of him and give him some education so that he can understand more how he should act toward the People's Republic of China,” or words to that effect.

So then we embarked, there was nothing we could do to help this poor fellow. A number of us were on the tug boat which pulled two barges, loaded with the remaining evacuees. We got out over the bar into open water and there was the U.S. troop ship General Gordon waiting for us. But there was a minor storm brewing and the sea became turbulent. We tried to unload one of the barges. Captain Sam Frankel, our naval attach#, almost fell trying to make it up the ladder. So the tug boat and barges pulled away and we decided there was no point in trying to transfer people in the rough water. We spent the night on the tug and barges and waited out the storm. Nobody had expected this, nobody had any food or warm clothing. Anne and I were fortunate in having a blanket available which we shared with someone. The tug had no facilities for passengers and only one toilet. A lot of the women and children were below deck and practically all of them were sea sick.

Q: There were no seats or anything.

VAN OSS: No, we were lying right on the deck huddled under a blanket trying to keep warm and from getting sick.

Q: This was April?

VAN OSS: This was April, 1950. Walter McConaughy, who took John Cabot's place as Consul General, was a very fine leader. He later became one of our leading ambassadors. He set a fine example for us all. During the whole episode he was dressed immaculately with his necktie and jacket, but looked just miserable and grim, and I thought angry. I went up to him and said, “Walter I suppose you are trying to compose a telegram about the outrageous procedures that we have been subjected to?” He said, “No, Hank, I am much more concerned with the contingencies of the moment.” He then walked over to the boat railing and punched his lunch, as they say. It was a miserable experience.

The next morning, the storm had abated. We climbed aboard the General Gordon and that was the end of the story.

Q: Not quite, you weren't in Japan yet.

VAN OSS: No, we didn't go to Japan, we went to Hong Kong.

Q: How long did that take?

VAN OSS: Oh, several days. On the General Gordon, we were living as the troops did, in stacked up bunks, with men and women in separate dormitories.

Q: And where was the dachshund?

VAN OSS: The dachshund was with us on the boat on the upper deck somewhere. I went up and exercised him every day.

Q: And there were about a thousand of you?

VAN OSS: Oh, I would have thought so but don't hold me to that.

Q: Give me a number.

VAN OSS: Probably more than that.

Q: Does that mean that everyone was gone? The Embassy was closed?

VAN OSS: All the official personnel were out. I would say almost all of the American citizens were out. But some were not. Some of the businessmen stayed. For example, there was a man named Bill Orchard who was head of the American Express bank in Shanghai. He had to stay because many Chinese had deposited money in his bank years before. In the meantime inflation had taken its toll. The bank wanted to return to them the actual amount they had originally deposited. But they said they wanted what the original deposit was worth now. So they wouldn't let him leave. He stayed in Shanghai quite a while.

Bob Bryan was a well-known lawyer and judge who was employed in the International section of Shanghai. He stayed and eventually was jailed for several years. He had a terrible time. His hair turned white and I think he got beriberi.

Q: To go back before you evacuated, can you tell us how the Department prepared for this Communist takeover which you said looked inevitable?

VAN OSS: Well, obviously by evacuating families and most wives and reducing personnel, cutting what had been a 200 man post down to about 30 or 40. I was lucky enough to be allowed to keep my wife; one other wife stayed. Both Anne and the other wife were working for the Consulate General and the military attach#, which was the reason they were allowed to stay.

Q: Was that Patsy Turner?

VAN OSS: Yes, Patsy Turner. Her husband was Vice Consul Dick Turner.

They also pulled out John Cabot, who had been our Consul General when I first got there. John Cabot was one of our best Foreign Service officers. He was a brilliant officer. A patrician in every sense of the word, which is obvious from his name. He was from Boston, of course. He had been ill for about a year before the Communists came in. The first few weeks or months after the Communists came in were particularly harrowing ones for various reasons. He was under great tension. So eventually the Department decided that it was time to bring him home. So he was transferred. He went out with Ambassador Leighton Stuart.

The person who should have taken charge after him was Sabin Chase, who was the next senior officer. Not only was he the highest ranking, he was also a Chinese language officer. But the Department in its wisdom, and I think in retrospect they were right to do this, decided that instead of putting Sabin Chase in charge, they would appoint Walter McConaughy who was the next highest ranking man at the Embassy, although ten or fifteen years younger than Sabin.

Walter McConaughy was a very fine leader and an excellent Foreign Service officer who eventually became Assistant Secretary of State for Chinese Affairs and Ambassador in various places, including Taiwan.

Sabin Chase was also a very fine officer but a very shy individual and rather soft spoken. He was not an administrator. He readily acknowledged that he knew nothing about it and wasn't really interested. He was a Chinese language officer, a political officer, an analyst, a scholar and those were his fortes.

McConaughy was put in charge and remained in charge until we evacuated the post. Sabin remained the entire time too and relations between the two of them were completely harmonious. Walter took Sabin's advice on all matters of substance and was meticulous in doing his best to keep Sabin from feeling hurt by having been passed over. I think

probably Sabin was quite relieved not to have the responsibility of personnel, evacuation and countless administrative details that had to be handled.

So the Department pared the post down to the bone and kept those who they thought would be most able to withstand the tensions that were obviously coming up.

The interesting thing about this whole experience was that it gave me an insight into just what it is like to be in a communist country where the communist government starts from scratch. There are various impressions that I have and I will ramble on about them.

One of them is the noise factor. There were loudspeakers on every street corner and they were turned on incessantly. If it wasn't Chinese music and opera, it was propaganda. We had propaganda in loud Mandarin at all times during the day or night.

Another impression I have is the extreme thoroughness of the Communists. They intruded into every walk of life. They made people attend infinite numbers of political meetings at which Communist officials talked for countless hours repeating endlessly the same slogans and general theories.

The early stages of the Communist takeover didn't have much impact on us except for the fact that our government didn't recognize them and we thus had no official status. But we were not molested, cursed or pelted with mud. On the other hand we had to be very careful because one of the things they did early in the game was to take measures to inform foreigners, white men if you will, that they were no longer on a pedestal, were no better than anyone else. In fact, they were a little bit worse than the citizens of China.

Where this comes into play is that there were still quite a few beggars in Shanghai. Eventually I understand the Communists got rid of them, but they certainly hadn't at this point. The beggars were a nuisance even for the Communists. They would come up to you and would clutch you and do just anything you would allow them to get away with. In the old days you sometimes were forced to push them aside and go about your business. It

was about the only thing you could do. Once the Communists had taken over this was no longer possible. The minute you so much as touched a beggar, no matter what he did to you, a policeman would appear and you would be taken into custody. This didn't happen to me but it did happen to a number of Americans and other foreigners. The routine was that they would be hauled before a political commissar, not a judge, and would be asked why they had molested a peaceful citizen of China. Then they would give their case. After that they would be fined or told to write a letter of apology and then allowed to go. But this was unpleasant. It was not great fun.

And, of course, one of the notorious episodes at the time was the Olive case. Bill Olive was a communications officer. On the day the Chinese Communists held their victory parade (without prior notice)—about a month after the takeover—Bill Olive happened to be in one car and Anne was following in another car to get gas at the godown where we had our gasoline supply. They had to cross one of those steep road bridges that goes over the canal or creek. Two soldiers jumped out at Bill Olive, who was in the lead, and tried to stop his car. They held up their hands. He either ignored them or didn't see them, drove over the bridge and was stopped on the other side. But Anne was fortunate enough to stop. Bill Olive's car then was sent along the canal on the other side and stopped. Bill put his hand out and motioned to Anne to get out of there, which she did. This was the last we saw of Bill Olive for a while. We didn't know where he was, he had just disappeared.

Eventually we found out that he had been taken to court, in fact was in jail. He told me this story afterwards. He was taken to the police station. All was well. He explained what he was doing. A police officer quizzed him. He asked if he could call the Consulate and just then the police officer was joined by one of these political commissars. The latter took over and claimed that Bill was trying to brush past guards of the Peoples Republic of China and interfere with the victory parade. By this time Bill was a little nervous and asked again to call the Consulate. The commissar said something like there isn't a Consulate any more, he couldn't call.

Then he told Olive that they were going to retain him for a night or two. Olive protested vigorously and the commissar ordered the guards to take him away. Bill struggled and grabbed the bench in front of the desk and knocked over a bottle of ink which, I guess, spilled onto the political commissar. He was then pulled back, thrown to the ground and beaten severely by the armed guards. They then took him and flung him into a jail with a lot of other detainees. That is how we found out where he was.

Later I think they put him into solitary confinement. I am not sure about that but anyway they wouldn't let him sleep. They kept the light on and kept taking him out for interrogation. This turned out to be the first instance of “brainwashing” that any of us had heard about first hand. They told him that the United States was worse than Nazi Germany and had committed grievous sins against the Peoples Republic of China. He, Bill Olive, as a representative of the U.S. government was just as guilty as that government. The grilling went on incessantly for several days. By the end of those days he was so beaten down...oh, and they made him write out endless numbers of confessions. By the end of those few days he could write out exactly what they wanted him to say, and almost believed he was as guilty as they told him he was. This was all in his mind, obviously. He was in pretty bad shape at that point.

Anyway to cut this short, I don't know exactly how long he was in jail but it was something like four or five days, perhaps a week. Eventually Sabin Chase and Bill Supple, our security officer, got him out. They almost got themselves arrested in the process, but they were able to get him released and bring him home. Olive was eventually evacuated from Shanghai. I am not sure what happened to him afterwards. I think he had psychological problems from then on.

This was a rather ominous event.

Q: So our diplomats were really in a very precarious situation?

VAN OSS: The Olive case was the only episode of that sort at the time and you could say that the authorities had some flimsy excuse because he did ignore their original instruction to stop his car. Later on, of course, after we Americans had left, the British stayed behind and were subjected to all kinds of embarrassing experiences. They were jailed, forced to kowtow, frog hop across the room and so on. Terribly humiliating.

Q: But the British recognized Red China and still they had this treatment.

VAN OSS: Yes, but it didn't come right away. It developed over time.

The other thing I wanted to mention about the Chinese Communists was the fact that they would take up several issues at a time and would go all out in support of these issues.

For example, if they were trying to stop dealing on the black market for silver dollars, they would make numerous speeches saying it was sinful to deal on the black market. They would write articles in the newspapers; children in the schools would sing songs about the sins of dealing in the black market. “Leaning to one side” became one of their slogans. Everything had to lean to one side. They would carry it to extremes in their parades by leaning with one shoulder...physically leaning to the left as they marched. Another slogan was “two steps forward, one step back.”

Q: What did that mean?

VAN OSS: That is an old Leninist Communist slogan. Two steps forward, one step back. In other words every once in a while something might not work out, but then they would move forward even more.

Q: A great way to excuse your mistakes.

VAN OSS: Yeah. Again in their parade marches their drums would beat, dum, dum, boom; dum, dum, boom. You could see the people marching going two steps forward and then

actually taking one step back, then two steps forward again and so on. It became a kind of dance.

Another policy aim, of course, was to go across to Taiwan, defeat the Nationalist forces and capture the “running dog,” Chiang Kai-shek. Little kindergarten kids instead of playing ring-around-the-rosy, performed little skits about rowing across the straits, catching Chiang Kai-shek, and then pretending to beat up the child playing the part of Chiang with pillows.

Q: And, yet they never did it.

VAN OSS: No, they never did it. But that was still one of their aims at the time.

Q: What happened commercially? Did stores stay open, was food available?

VAN OSS: The economic situation in Shanghai had become deplorable during the last months of the Nationalists' regime. Inflation was just terrible. The rate would go from say one million yuan to one American dollar one day, to two million to one the next day. At one time Chiang Kai-shek put his son Chiang Ching-kuo in charge of Shanghai. Ching-kuo put in a new exchange rate and forced everybody to turnover gold in exchange for this new currency. He shot a couple of reputable businessmen who patronized the black market in currency. Of course by doing that it meant that nobody could buy anything in Shanghai because the shelves were empty since merchants could get more money by selling their products outside the city at black market rates than inside at the official rate. Eventually Chiang Ching-kuo was forced to lift the limits on the currency and inflation zoomed again.

When the Communists came in they tied the currency to the price at any one time of basic commodities...rice, cotton, tobacco and gold. So if you put a certain amount of money in the bank on a given day, you were credited with the amount of rice, cotton, etc. that that original amount of money could buy. So no matter what happened to the actual currency exchange rate you could always get the same quantity of the basic commodities as you

were credited with when you had originally deposited. That pretty well did away with inflation within a very short time.

Q: One of the smarter things that I have ever heard doing.

VAN OSS: Yes, I often wonder why we don't do something like it? Of course our inflation rate has never been that high.

During the period of inflation we used to call home in the U.S. at the beginning of the month. The bill would be equivalent of say U.S. $35 in Chinese currency. We would actually pay the bill at the end of the month. By that time the bill was only equal to about 35 cents.

Another thing the Communists did. They put a severe tax on all vehicles. So if you owned a car you were expected to pay something along the lines of $50 per month tax on that car. This doesn't sound too unreasonable today, but back when a vice consul's salary was something like $4000 a year, it was a heavy sum. So we sent our car home as did most other people and had to take pedicabs.

That really was one of the best things we ever did because we saw more of Shanghai that way than we ever would have seen in a car. In those days I think the Foreign Service spent a great deal of time dealing with other officials, driving in cars and living with the upper crust with very little idea of how the peasants, the poor, the lower classes lived. We used to take walks outside Shanghai and into the villages but there was very little Peace Corps-type community activity, which now I think every young Foreign Service officer probably does without thinking twice about it. We used to do that later at our African posts. But in our days in China we dealt mainly with the people who could give us the information we wanted and didn't worry too much about wandering about in the villages. And, of course, we couldn't; with the Communist war going on we couldn't travel very far beyond city limits.

Q: Did the Communists make any efforts to keep you from contact with the people?

VAN OSS: No, I don't think they made any conscious efforts but the mere fact that we no longer had access to cars except the official cars which took us to work, meant that we just couldn't...and we weren't allowed to travel. We had to have permission for any travel. The war was still going on in the south and we couldn't go down there and there was no point going out west. It was just a time when we were very severely limited as to where we could go, so that inhibited our contacts. And, of course, many of our contacts were afraid to come to us because they were afraid that something would happen to them. And many of our contacts were genuinely trying to get along with the new government, so they wouldn't have phoned us. They began to accuse us of the same things the government was accusing us of doing.

Q: Well, they were probably having to go to these political training classes and learning what to say.

VAN OSS: Yes, a lot of them were.

Q: What about the men in the street, the peasant class, did they seem to welcome this new government?

VAN OSS: I think anything was better for most of them than what they had under the Nationalist government.

Q: Except nothing did become better for them.

VAN OSS: Well, I don't know that I could dogmatically say that. I think probably economically they were better off in some ways. China was not Europe; its average standard of living was much worse than Europe's. The average person in China was poor. There certainly were many poor in the cities. In Shanghai after a typical winter's night the authorities collected bodies off the street of people who had to sleep out and had frozen

to death. We saw a bundle in the street outside our house one time coming back from a walk. Our dog started sniffing at it. I went over to see what it was. It was a dead baby. The watchman at our place said it was probably a baby girl that the poor family had not wanted and had thrown out on the street.

There were wealthy businessmen who did very well under the Nationalists, but the man in the street didn't. So I can't say dogmatically that the peasants were worse off under the Communists. They were worse off in the sense that their lives were controlled; they had to obey regulations and couldn't do what they wanted to do, but they couldn't do everything they wished under the Nationalists either. Don't forget Chiang Kai-shek's KMT party structure was very similar to the Communist Party structure. Chiang Ching-kuo, Chiang's son, was trained in Moscow. The people who were affected adversely under the Communists, of course, were those who had money and owned land.

In the early months it wasn't all that bad for us personally. We were not treated the way we felt we should be as American consular representatives, but we weren't harmed.

Q: There was food.

VAN OSS: There was food. I know that soon after we left the beggars were disposed of in some way. They just disappeared from the streets.

Q: Not only was there bombing of the harbor during that time you mention, but also any number of factories.

VAN OSS: I wouldn't put too much stress on the bombing, it didn't amount to very much. It wasn't nearly as severe as the shelling just before the city fell, for example, although the Communists didn't have any planes so there was no bombing from the sky. After Shanghai fell to the Communists, the Nationalists sent over a few planes periodically to drop a few bombs. But we used to go down to the coffee bar in the basement of our Consulate office and use that as our bomb shelter when the sirens went off. Sometimes we would

be upstairs and a plane would appear without a warning siren. On one such occasion, I watched a Nationalist plane bombard and sink a vessel in the river.

Carrying on about what life was like under the Communists, there wasn't very much in the way of entertainment, but there were a few Chinese operas we could watch. One of the good things that I can still remember was seeing one of the most famous old Chinese actors, Mai Lan-fang. He was in his declining years as an actor, in his late fifties, I guess. In traditional Chinese opera the female parts were taken by men and Mai Lan-fang was one of the most famous of all female impersonators. We saw him twice. He really put on a tremendous performance. He was graceful slender, made up to look like a woman, sang in a high falsetto, had all the stylized gestures that actors have in Chinese opera. The only trouble was that whenever he turned his profile you could see that he had at least two or maybe three double chins. That was the only sign of age.

Another thing we did for entertainment...there were a number of refugee musicians—White Russians, German Jews, etc. In particular there were two Czech brothers who played the cello and the first violin, a Chinese female pianist who was very, very good, and an old White Russian violist. Walter McConaughy was a very accomplished clarinetist. Our hosts, the Abrahams, were Iraqi Jews who had made a small fortune as merchants in Shanghai. They used to have, I think once a week, chamber music sessions where people like us attended and played Beethoven, Mozart, Bach. Sometimes they would invite others in and play octets. That was very soul satisfying.

The rest of the entertainment was done by ourselves. We had parties, played bridge...

Q: Then you went to the race course I suppose?

VAN OSS: We did, but we went to the race course to play softball. I never saw a horse race in Shanghai. But I did play a lot of softball.

Oh, another thing we did...there was an American Club and a British Country Club. These combined forces after the Communists came in. The British Country Club was used in the winter because it had an indoor pool and various other indoor recreational activities. The American Club was used in the summer. The British would come out and join us. We had the usual contests in softball where the British played our game, and then we would play the British in cricket. I remember the cricket game particularly because the British came to bat first and hit the ball very far, but they didn't realize that as baseball players we Americans knew how to catch, so we caught all their long balls. They made only about five runs. We made about fifteen and won the first innings. But in the second innings the British had learned from their experience, kept the ball on the ground and made about 200 runs while we continued to make about fifteen.

Q: Was there a golf course anywhere around?

VAN OSS: There was, but I didn't play golf in those days. I did a lot of swimming in the American Club outdoor pool.

Q: I wonder who laid out the golf course? How long had it been there?

VAN OSS: I have no idea. I seem to remember that there was a golf course in the race course grounds. But I may be thinking of something else. But at any rate I didn't play golf. I have played golf since but not at that time.

Q: It just stays in my mind because I remember a diplomat who also had done a lot out in the Far East and was with us in Bucharest in the fifties and we had this little six hole golf course left over. The Communists had been persuaded to leave six holes of King Carol's eighteen holes. This diplomat used to say that this was the last golf course going East until you get to Shanghai. So that is why I ask, there must have been a golf course in Shanghai.

VAN OSS: One of the other things I might mention is that we lived quite remarkably well for a few months in Shanghai after the Communists took over because we had quite a

large number of houses that we had acquired...German property that we had taken over after the war. We wanted to maintain these houses so a number of us who had been living in an apartment building were awarded houses. I got Ruben Thomas's house, he was the administrative officer who had left by this time. A delightful house out on what we called Amherst Avenue. It had lovely furniture, a walled yard, just a very nice comfortable house with a fireplace in each bedroom, central heating, etc. All officers had comparable quarters for several months. Then as the time approached for us to leave, and as things began to get dicier and less pleasant, we were all brought together so that we could be taken out more easily. We were collected into an apartment house owned by the Consulate General. That was all right too but not nearly as elegant as our Amherst Avenue dwelling.

Q: Did you get your personal belongings shipped out?

VAN OSS: Yes, we shipped them out when we left Hamilton House, the first apartment house.

Q: So ships were still coming in at that time?

VAN OSS: Yes, they were, but they had to run the Nationalist blockade. We thought we were very clever, and I guess we were, because we used a Soviet packing company. We figured that it would be more likely to be able to get our stuff out than an American company, although I don't think there was one there at that time.

Q: I wonder why there was a Soviet one?

VAN OSS: Well, this was owned by a Russian and Russian firms were beginning to come into evidence in Shanghai. There had been a Soviet Consulate General there even under the Nationalists.

Q: They had diplomatic relations with...

VAN OSS: Well, I think they still had some relations with the Nationalist government because I can remember one of the Soviet military attach#s joshing Fern Cavender. Anyway, we used this Soviet packer. He packed up our belongings which didn't amount to very much in those days...mainly books. They were shipped out to Saigon which was our next post. We had hoped to be sent home on leave after Shanghai because we were all pretty tired out from being under considerable tension and working long hours. But we were assigned to Saigon. In fact, we were assigned to Saigon and ordered to leave at once at a time when there was no way any of us could get out of Shanghai.

Q: Was it that the Department was just unaware of what you were going through?

VAN OSS: I think certain clerks in the Personnel Section were told that I was being assigned to Saigon, so they went through process B and then sent the usual form cable. We still had some cables coming in through U.S. Naval ships that were still anchored outside Shanghai and able to relay them to us. This was about six months before we got out.

Q: Until when could you keep cable traffic to the Department?

VAN OSS: The Navy kept a ship offshore and we had our communications for quite a while, perhaps several months, after the Communists came in. One day we saw a police car and a bunch of soldiers in a truck approach the Consulate General...(We had already destroyed virtually all our files except the ones that we needed for our daily work. We burned stuff that had been in the Shanghai Consulate files for many years, including old narcotics records among others. It took us a couple of days to get rid of them. The neighbors complained because of all the smoke and ashes. Unfortunately, by this time it was too late to ship any of the stuff out. Anyway we still had our code room. We were allowed to send letters to our parents in fifty words or less by cable through the Navy services.)

We saw this car pulling up and knew at once that the police were coming in to close our code room. At that time we didn't know how far they were going to go. So I went up on the roof where we had an incinerator and took all the classified files left and burned them. As it turned out they didn't impound our documents, they just put a seal on the code room. So that pretty well shut us down. From then on we sent letters out whenever we could get them on a ship or whenever anybody left the place, in any way we could. Sometimes we tried the open mail and strangely enough most of our letters apparently got home.

Q: So then you had no communications with the Department?

VAN OSS: It seems to me we had people in Canton which was still open and we were able to get some stuff to them. But I just don't know how we did it after the code room closed. I don't think couriers were coming in. It may be that the Department just telegraphed through open wires and we did the same.

I remember at one point officers had to take turns sleeping in the code room for security.

Q: We now move on to the period of 1951-53 when he was Consul and Principal Officer in Kuala Lumpur, Malaya. When did you arrive in Malaya?

VAN OSS: Well, I arrived in April, 1951. I was sent first to Singapore because Kuala Lumpur was a subsidiary post to Singapore, the Consulate General there. This was a somewhat strange situation because while the Singapore Consul General was my immediate supervisor, I was instructed to report directly to the Department and simply send Singapore copies of what I produced. This led to all sorts of problems because the Acting Consul General at Singapore was under the sway, or listened very closely to Malcolm MacDonald who was the British Commissioner General for the whole area. He had very pronounced views on what was going on in the Federation of Malaya. I, however, was under the High Commissioner of the Federation of Malaya who was actively engaged

in the very things that Malcolm MacDonald was also covering but had a very different view of these matters.

Anyway, I stopped off in Singapore and was assigned first to attend as U.S. observer a regional rice conference there sponsored by the British. I did this for about a week and reported on it. Bob Huffman was Economic Officer in Singapore and he was an observer along with me. We wrote a long despatch on it. The conference was highly interesting. I had known nothing about rice, but I learned a lot and came to realize how important rice was to the countries represented at the conference. For example, the Ceylonese representative would try to figure out how much rice India wanted to import. He wanted to be sure they didn't import so much that his country wouldn't be able to get what it needed. There was quite a bit of bargaining and negotiating.

When the conference was over I prepared to go up to Kuala Lumpur. Those of you who were in the Foreign Service, may recall that at one time informational material on what the Foreign Service was like used to say, “Now you may be posted to London, Paris or Rome, but you also may be assigned to Kuala Lumpur.” Well, I was assigned to Kuala Lumpur and at the time was not at all happy about it; I wanted to go to Vienna. Needless to say my wants were not paid attention to and I ended up in Kuala Lumpur.

This had been a very small post, opened, if I remember correctly, by Bill Blue four or five years earlier, possibly around 1947. Dick Poole was my immediate predecessor there. He and his whole staff lived in one house which was also the Consulate office. It was on Ampang Road, right next to tin tailings and an open pit tin mine. A nice old house with four large bedrooms upstairs, it was completely open with only shutters to keep out the elements. We slept under mosquito netting. Larry Nichols was the public affairs officer and was in one room with his wife and a young daughter. One of the clerks was in another room and another clerk in the third room. Dick Poole himself was in the fourth bedroom. The office took up all the downstairs except for the dining room.

Dick Poole asked me if I would mind if he left his seven dogs with me. All of them except one were of the female gender and able to breed, which they did regularly. I said, “No, please get rid of them.” He tried and got rid of about three of them, but there were four left and I eventually ended up by keeping three of the four. Then I got rid of another one and retained two, including the one male. The female bred several times to our dismay, although I tried to keep her from doing so. So we ended up with a third dog, one of her puppies.

It was an impossible situation because here was this whole small group jammed together, all of them living right on top of each other and working in the same building. I protested vehemently before I went out there and finally got the Department to agree that Anne, who was expecting our first child, and I would have the house to ourselves. They were planning to move the office down town anyway, which they did a few weeks after I got there. We found much more suitable housing for the secretaries, clerks and the USIS head.

The new office was in what was called the Loke Yew building. The Loke Yew building was the skyscraper in Kuala Lumpur. It was seven stories high and far and away the tallest building in the place. Now, I understand, nobody knows where it is and there are dozens of buildings that are at least three or four times taller. But in those days it was the giant. It was right beside the river from which Kuala Lumpur got its name. I think it means something like “muddy confluence of rivers.” Two rivers met forming one river just at that point and there was a mosque right in the angle of the Y.

Q: Do you remember the names of those rivers?

VAN OSS: I would have to look that up.

This was in the pre air conditioning days. The only concession we made to the hot sun was to have tinted windows. But I remember that in those days we were much more formal in our working habits than the Foreign Service is today. We all wore suits and ties.

Sometimes we would take our jackets off, but I perspired through at least three suits a day, especially if I went out in the evening. It was very, very humid. The heat was perhaps in the 85-90 range, but the humidity must have been close to 100 percent.

Q: Is Kuala Lumpur close to sea level?

VAN OSS: I think so, yes. There are hills around it but it is almost at sea level. There is a spine of mountains that goes down the center of the Malayan Peninsula, but Kuala Lumpur was not very high up.

The reason that I think of Kuala Lumpur as one of the most interesting posts I have ever had and, perhaps, one of the most important posts as well, is that it was then the scene of the third hottest war or military conflict in the world. The Korean war was going on, next came the Vietnamese conflict, and then you had the Malayan “emergency” which was a very, very troublesome affair for the British.

The Federation of Malaya was then a British dependency. The British High Commissioner was the top man. He had been faced since 1948 with a communist insurrection which had been started by Communist Chinese who were holed up in the jungles of Malaya. For years they made the life of the British and the Malays miserable. There weren't very many of them. I think during the period I was there, there were some 2000 or 2500 Communist Party members. There was the MRLA or Malayan Races Liberation Army, which numbered about 4000. Then there was a group of from 10,000-30,000 called the Min Yuen comprising the supporting infrastructure which gave the MRLA and the Communist Party their provisions. The Min Yuen was the “water in which the fish swam,” to use Mao's famous metaphor. In other words at the most there were 4000 or 5000 fighting guerrillas. These managed to keep something on the order of 150,000 to 200,000 armed forces busy until the mid-fifties, long after I left.

Q: These forces were British?

VAN OSS: Well, there were some British, about 25,000. There were another 25,000 from other countries in the British Commonwealth like Fiji Islands, South Africa, etc. Then there were about 50,000 police and 50,000 militia and say another 50,000-60,000 in what was called the home guard.

Q: And those were Malayans?

VAN OSS: Yes of one sort or another, mostly Malays. The Communist guerrillas were surely 98 percent Chinese. They had what they called a “Malay” regiment stationed somewhere but these regiments were the size of battalions at the most...500 men, let's say. I don't think there were that many Malay communists. This was a Chinese movement and one reason why it never succeeded. It eventually failed because the majority of population did not support the communists. There are more Malays in Malaya than Chinese, not many more but about two and a half million Malays, to about two million Chinese and then another 500,000-600,000 Indians, Ceylonese and indigenous people. The Malays were always on the side of the British, so what little support the communists had, had to come from the Chinese community. Most of the Chinese community was pro-Nationalist China and supporters of Chiang Kai-shek. Many of them were businessmen and the city Chinese were certainly overwhelmingly pro-Nationalist and anti-Communist. So there wasn't very much support in the country for these guerrillas.

But the one thing they had going for them was the environment. They knew how to operate in the jungle. They had been trained to fight the Japanese...the British had helped train some of them. They made their camps deep in these jungles or rain forests. Malaya was in those days at least 80 percent covered by dense forests. For example, a plane flying over the forests would spot the trickle of smoke coming out of the trees and would assume that down there was some kind of a guerrilla camp. This would be about 20 miles from Kuala Lumpur, let's say. The plane would go back and report the location and a detachment of troops would be sent out to get to the camp. They would get there about two weeks later because of the difficulty of hacking their way through the jungle and by that time

the camp would be empty. So finding the guerrillas was very difficult and required a very strong intelligence effort on the part of the British. They had to be quite innovative in order to smoke these people out. Some of the tactics they adopted were used by us and the French in Vietnam in succeeding years.

The High Commissioner when I got there was a gentleman by the name of Sir Henry Gurney. A very fine gentleman. Very, very helpful. He told me when I called on him the first time, “Anything you want from us we will give you. Any information we have you may have.” And he was as good as his word. I had weekly meetings with one of his assistants who would pass official reports over to me which I would take back to my office and use in my own reports to Washington. At that time I think we had just about as much information on military operations as there was to get. What the British knew, we knew. I don't mean every last intelligence operation and that sort of thing, but I think they were very forthcoming. Sir Henry himself certainly was very cooperative.

The security situation in Kuala Lumpur was rather sensitive. In fact, when I was in Singapore, Bill Langdon, who was then Consul General, offered to sell me one of his Mauser pistols. He said I would need it because every time I went outside Kuala Lumpur I should be armed. I bought this thing and have been saddled with it ever since. I have never used it or fired it in anger. In fact, I never carried it anywhere. But I also had a .38 caliber police positive which I did carry with me on occasion.

Q: What is a police positive?

VAN OSS: A police positive is a .38 caliber, short muzzled revolver, what the police used to carry in those days. A six shot revolver.

Q: Was it that dangerous on the street?

VAN OSS: Oh, yes. Well, not so much on the city streets, but if you went into the bush or forest outside the town. I didn't carry it everywhere I went, only whenever I went out

on an expedition of some sort. There was one place you could go safely by car and that was Port Swettenham which was the seaport on the west coast about an hour's drive from Kuala Lumpur. You could also drive up to Frazer's Hill, which was in the mountains. It was a resort which people went to to escape the heat. Indeed when you went there you found yourself in a little bit of merry old England. Lovely cottages with beautiful flowers. It was about 70 degrees rather than 85, dry, and went down to say 60 at night. It was really a wonderful change. There was afternoon tea and a log fire in the fireplace even though it was a bit too warm for that.

Apart from those two places, anywhere you went...when you went out to the tin mines or to the rubber plantations...you always made sure that you were armed and that nobody knew you were going...that you didn't tell anyone by telephone. If you went out into the countryside you were usually required to have a military escort of some sort.

In fact, my predecessor one time was sleeping soundly in his house when shots rang out right on Ampang Road. He got up and remembered he had locked his revolver in the office safe, so he made his way downstairs in the dark and managed to open the safe and get his gun out. But by that time everything was all over. It turned out that one of the guards had had a nightmare or something like that and had shot off his rifle. The other guards heard his shot and fired off in all directions.

Q: These 4000 or so guerrillas were able to harass this whole huge country?

VAN OSS: Yes. It wasn't so much actual harassment as the knowledge that they could do so if they wished.

They permeated the place. They were down in Johore in the southern part, in Malacca, Selangor, everywhere except the main cities. They didn't thrive in the cities and as far as we know they didn't have much support in the cities. But they did terrorize the rubber tappers, the villagers...I'll go into this a little bit later.

But I wanted to mention the security aspect because it was brought home to us with shocking clarity one day in early October when we heard the rumor that Sir Henry Gurney had been assassinated. It turned out to be true. He had been ambushed on his way to Frazer's Hill. It was determined that the people in the ambush knew, probably by tapping his telephone, he was coming up there because they were hidden around a certain bend in the road and several vehicles were allowed to go through without harassment. They knew exactly when and where Sir Henry Gurney's vehicle would be. I think he always had two military vehicles accompany him. One of them had to stop for some reason or other. I have forgotten whether it broke down or whether there was an obstruction on the road. The other one, the leading one, went through the ambush and then the ambush closed in on Sir Henry Gurney. They started firing. He had his wife with him and told her to get down on the floor. Then he left the car to draw fire away from her—I have no doubt that he tried to do this because he was a very courageous and honorable gentleman. They got him. He died in a ditch. If he had stayed in the car, according to the police chief at that time, he probably would have survived.

So that was a shocker to all of us. His place was eventually taken by Sir Gerald Templar, who I will have quite a bit to say about later on.

What I want to say about Gurney is that he and his director of operations, Sir Harold Briggs, were responsible for some very farsighted and interesting policies that were over a long period of time expected to win this guerrilla war. Briefly, the Briggs plan was to get the Chinese squatters...well I guess I have to go back a bit.

The Chinese entered this country about 70 years before this, mainly as businessmen or as tin miners. A lot of them came in and as the mines wore out they became squatters on land all throughout the peninsula. These squatters were the main people from whom the Min Yuen got their recruits and from which the MRLA got their supplies. These people had no protection, it was very difficult with them squatting all over the place. So the Briggs plan

in brief was to bring them into areas that would be fortified. They would be given houses, there would be schools and they would be protected by armed guards.

This eventually became the strategic hamlet program in Vietnam. Sir Robert Thompson, the famous expert who advised our people in Vietnam, was the man who actually drew this up for Sir Harold Briggs and Sir Henry Gurney.

After Gurney was assassinated, Sir Gerald Templar came in and applied muscle to this whole policy and drove it through to a successful conclusion. Sir Harold Briggs left shortly after Sir Henry Gurney was assassinated and his place was taken by Sir Rob Lockhart, who had been the international head of the Boy Scouts, among other things.

While Sir Harold Briggs was in effect the brains and muscle behind the Gurney policy, Sir Rob Lockhart was completely eclipsed by Sir Gerald Templar, Sir Henry's successor. Sir Gerald Templar was really quite a remarkable man, one of the most remarkable I have been associated with. He was a former hurdler, a slender person. He had been head of British military intelligence, I believe. He had been one of the youngest full generals in World War II and had been the only general to have been wounded by a piano.

He was riding in his staff car and there was a truck in front of him carrying a piano. The truck rode over a mine and the piano went up in the air and came down on top of poor Sir Gerald Templar. As a result he always had trouble with his back. He wasn't crippled, but he was rather physically frail. But spiritually, very strong. He was very outspoken, lavish in his use of profanity, and quite an interesting person in every respect.

I remember him telling me at one point that he should have been born in the 18th or 19th century. He said, “If indeed I had been born at that time, the first thing I would do would be to invade Siam, and the second thing I would do would be to invade Singapore and take over Phoenix Park.”

A little explanation of this. The communist guerrillas had safe havens in Thailand. When things got too hot for them in the Federation, they would just disappear over the border and go to their safe havens in the jungles of Thailand. So you just couldn't put your fingers on them. First of all they were dispersed and secondly, even if you knew where they were, they were much more mobile than the British forces so they couldn't really get at them. Thailand did not look kindly on hot pursuit or anything like that, so Sir Gerald was always having trouble with Thailand.

Phoenix Park in Singapore was Malcolm MacDonald's headquarters. MacDonald was on a completely different track from Sir Gerald Templar. The son of former Labor Prime Minister Ramsey MacDonald, he was a liberal, a very nice man. He was very much interested in the Chinese and had very good Chinese contacts in Singapore from whom he was getting a pro-Chinese point of view. Not the point of view of the communist guerrillas, but that of the Chinese merchants. Sir Gerald Templar had little patience with any Chinese. He wanted them to shape up or ship out. Every time Malcolm MacDonald had suggestions as to how one should be careful about Chinese sensitivities, etc., Templar would gnash his teeth, dig in and do what he darn well pleased anyway. The two weren't actually hostile to each other, but they were just thinking along different lines. Templar was a pragmatist and military man and he wanted to wind up the guerrilla war quickly. He was going to protect people and force them into these new villages and make sure they went there whether they wanted to or not. He had little patience for Malcolm MacDonald's liberal, anthropological approach.

Q: So after you moved into the new Consulate premises in the skyscraper in Kuala Lumpur, what was the size of your staff?

VAN OSS: I will have to count it up. It was a pretty small office. I had a young Vice Consul named David Dean, who was consular officer, and deputy political reporter. Kuala Lumpur was his first post and he later went on to fame and fortune and became head of our mission responsible for relations with Taiwan after we recognized Communist

China. My economic officer was first Bob Myer and then Dick Peters. We had a political attach# named Bob Wall. We had two secretaries and a code clerk. The head of USIS was Larry Nichols and later Jack Gertz who had a deputy, whose name I can't remember at this point. Then we had an administrative officer. There were about eight or ten local employees.

The office, itself, was certainly adequate. We had a security area where only Americans were allowed to be because even in those days we were very security conscious. At one time at Bob Wall's urging, I ordered some carbines so that when and if we ever had to evacuate our post we would have a means of protecting ourselves. As you know all offices in those days had to have an evacuation plan and we had one. Unfortunately, the Department or somebody went overboard and we found ourselves the proud possessors of no less than sixteen carbines, all of them packed up in some foul smelling grease. Under Bob Wall's tuition, because he was the only one, I think, who knew anything about weaponry, we locked all the doors, pulled the blinds, because no one was supposed to know we had these carbines, and started to clean them up. I think we got through four and by that time I was thoroughly sick and tired of the whole business. We all stank of this oil, our clothes were ruined. I called a halt and said that we would keep twelve as they were and use the four we had cleaned. After all there were probably only four of us who could shoot anyway.

We were on the third floor, but my memory may be faulty there, and the USIS was downstairs on the second floor. The work that we did...I was delighted with this post because I could get up in the morning and say to myself, “What am I going to do today? Shall I cover the guerrilla emergency? Shall I go down and get briefed by the military? Shall I go downtown and talk to some of my Chinese and Malay contacts?” It was like an embassy in microcosm. It had everything that an embassy had except that there wasn't as much of it. I just was happy to be in charge and responsible for what was going on.

We did a lot of economic reporting. Malaya in those days exported tin and rubber to the United States. These were their main exports. They also had palm oil and the usual other tropical products. But those two were far and away their main products. Kuala Lumpur itself was right in the middle of important tin mining operations. We had a fair sized American community...several dozen at least. They were largely concerned with tin mining.

Pacific Tin Company had its headquarters in Kuala Lumpur. Norman Cleaveland was its President and Managing Director. He became a very close friend, was a great fellow. Eventually he wrote a book called “Bang, Bang In Ampang,” in which he was kind enough to mention me once or twice. He had a big gold dredge outside of Kuala Lumpur which was working a tin mine. He had about a half a dozen Americans working for him and I was close to all of them.

We also had an American engineer on the east coast in the Kuantan area of Pahang. There was a big iron mountain there and he was in charge of the mining operation.

There were some American missionaries in Kuala Lumpur. One was a fellow named Gunner Theilman, who was a Methodist minister, a very fine fellow. He didn't drink or smoke, of course. But he was extremely kind and nice. And there were several other Americans attached to his mission. I would suppose there were several dozen Americans in all.

One of the first things we had to do when we first arrived was to throw a July Fourth party. This was 1951 and the 175th anniversary of American independence was being celebrated. Our party was a big one by our standards, with something like 300 guests. Anne was pregnant at the time and had to stand in the receiving line to greet all the guests as they came in. That was the first social event that we hosted. There was a very thriving social life, lots of entertaining to do. There were contacts to have lunch with. Lots of people were inviting us over. A typical Foreign Service post where you are on duty literally twenty-

four hours a day. You get very little sleep. That, plus the heat, plus the fact that there was no air conditioning at all, and that the monsoons leach vitamins out of food, made all of us get physically run-down and lose weight. It was both physically and mentally wearing. I suppose the fact that we were constantly worried about security matters too, had something to do with the tension we were under.

There was always a great deal to report. We also had many visitors, important visitors. We had, for example, at one time Justice Douglas. This was quite amusing because he arrived and came off the plane (reporters were all out at the airport en masse to meet him) wearing an old fedora hat, a dirty old shirt open halfway down his chest, khaki pants of which one pocket had torn open, and carrying a canvass water bag. In other words he was dressed for the wilds. He was not there on a protocol visit. The reporters looked past him. I recognized him and greeted him. He had a friend with him, Gilbert something. He stayed about a week with us and was a delightful visitor. It is a shame that his last days in the Supreme Court were so unpleasant because when I saw him in Malaya in 1952, he was all man, vigorous and interested in everything.

One interesting anecdote: when Sir Gerald Templar heard Justice Douglas was in town, he invited him to dinner. I said, “Yes, I am sure he would like to come, but I don't think he will have brought his tuxedo with him.” (All dinners at King's House were black tie affairs.) Lady Templar said, “Oh, I am sure you could find something for him.” I said, “Well, I probably could, but I am not sure he would be terribly happy about wearing somebody else's tuxedo, but I will try.” So I did try. He had a pair of dark pants and I found a white dinner jacket and a black tie for him. But we couldn't find black shoes. So we went to the dinner.

The format at King's House is that all guests assemble downstairs and then at the appropriate moment Sir Gerald and his wife descend the grand stairway and go around and shake hands with each guest. So, as Lady Templar came to...

[end tape 3]

...Justice Douglas, her eyes started at his face, then came down to his black tie, white jacket and black trousers. She said, “Ah, I see that you found something and all is well.” He was blushing. Then her eyes fell down to his brown shoes and she did a double take and went on to the next person. He was trying, as he said, to get his shoes under the carpet to hide them.

One thing that bothered me about that dinner. The guest of honor was Lord Tweedsmuir, who was the son of John Buchan, the author of “The Thirty-Nine Steps.” He was a mere lad in his early twenties. He sat at the Templar's right and Justice Douglas sat way down “behind the salt” opposite me. Justice Douglas had been a presidential candidate and was a Supreme Court Justice, and I thought surely British protocol could have done a little bit better for him. On the other hand he was an unexpected guest so I guess we had to make allowances. Anyway, neither of us said anything or even thought about it at the time.

We had other guests. We had Thomas Dewey but nothing of great moment happened there, except that he couldn't hear anything when he got off the plane. We had somebody or other Foster, then Under Secretary for Defense. I remember he was supposed to arrive at a certain time to go to lunch at King's House and his plane arrived an hour and a half late coming from Burma or some such place.

We had John F. Kennedy and Bobby, who had just graduated from law school, and one of their sisters. But the sister never showed up in Kuala Lumpur, I think she stayed in Singapore.

Q: Why were they all coming to Kuala Lumpur?

VAN OSS: Well, because this was an interesting place. It had the third hottest war as I told you and economically it was very important. Tin and rubber were both very important to us in those post-war periods.

Q: Was John Kennedy in Congress at that time?

VAN OSS: He was a Congressman at that time. I am ashamed to say that although John F. Kennedy entered Princeton the same time that I did, spent several months there and lived in the same dormitory that I lived in, I never knew him. I didn't know at the time he came to Malaya that he had ever gone to Princeton. He got some blood disease, perhaps hepatitis I believe, left Princeton after a few months and subsequently went to Harvard. I may say that if I had known he was a classmate, his visit would have been a far more pleasant experience then it turned out to be.

Adlai Stevenson visited Malaya after he had been defeated in the 1952 presidential election. I may interject that all the British wanted Adlai Stevenson to win, even Sir Gerald Templar. He liked and was a great admirer of Ike, but as an intellectually superior person himself, he thought Stevenson's speeches were great stuff and that he would be a much better president than Eisenhower. Stevenson came with Barry Bingham, the head of the Louisville Courier Journal. Anne's parents were great friends of the Binghams and I knew them reasonably well. He came with Bill Attwood, who was then one of the editors of Look magazine and later became Ambassador to Guinea and Kenya. There were several others whom I can't recall.

I might mention one little episode that gave me a gray hair or two. I had arranged to have Stevenson taken out by helicopter over the jungle so that he could get an idea of what the terrain was like. There were only two operating large helicopters at that time, which we had supplied the British. My boss from Singapore, Chuck Baldwin, was up for the occasion and there was no room for yours truly on either helicopter. So I stayed morosely at home while Adlai and all the others went off on these two helicopters.

I had been at my desk for a couple of hours when the phone rang. General Templar's aide was on the phone and he said, “Hank, there has been a slight to-do.” I said, “What do you mean, a slight to-do?” “Well there has been a spot of trouble on one of the helicopters.” I began to tense up a bit. I said, “There has been? Which helicopter?” “Oh, I'm not sure,” he said, “Don't panic. I'm sure everything is all right. But as a matter of fact, one of them has gone down.” And I said, “Which one?” I was getting highly excited at this point. He said, “As a matter of fact it is the one with Stevenson on it.” I really began to sweat, wondering where I could find a flag to cover the casket, etc. A few minutes later the aide called again and said, “Nothing to worry about, the other helicopter has landed and taken Adlai Stevenson off. Nobody is hurt, everything is all right.”

Well, what happened was that the main rotor stopped whirling on Stevenson's helicopter. Its descent was slowed by the tail rotor which was still turning. The pilot with great skill brought his machine down in a small clearing in the jungle and everybody was safe. But boy, I was trying to figure out how I could have explained why I had allowed the Democratic presidential candidate to risk his life in a helicopter in a zone of hostilities.

Q: Without going with him too.

VAN OSS: Without being there to help him. My boss (Chuck Baldwin) was there to hold his hand.

The point to all this is that Kuala Lumpur was on the milk run for many prominent people. We did have a number of visitors of one sort or another and that always made for tough work as any Foreign Service officer knows. When you have an important visitor, a Congressman or political figure, you have to do what you can to see that his visit is successful and that takes time. When your facilities and resources are limited that means that you have to do a lot of things yourself. The rest of the work goes on so you have to squeeze them in in some way. So we were very, very busy.

Another man I might mention was Donald MacGillivray, the Deputy High Commissioner under Templar. When I first saw him I thought, dear me, here is the epitome of the British public school, wimp-type Britisher. He was thin with a prominent Adam's apple and looked as though a breath of air would blow him over. But I couldn't have been more wrong. He turned out to be a very fine person. He supplied the human touch that Sir Gerald Templar had but kept under wraps.

He was the one who did most of the traveling throughout the peninsula. He was kind enough to take me along with him on several occasions. Otherwise it would have been very difficult for me to get to some places. Everything was laid on for him, and I just piggy-backed along and saw a lot of things that I otherwise might have had great difficulty seeing. We visited a number of rubber plantations. We stayed in a Malaya Kampol. The Malays often lived in houses on stilts. They built their houses up off the ground so that air could circulate and domesticated animals were kept underneath. We spent a night or two in one of those. We visited the British advisers in the various Malay principalities.

I might point out now at this point that the Federation of Malaya consisted of nine Sultanic states and two settlements: Penang and Malacca. The nine Sultanic states were ruled by sultans. The British had a special arrangement with each sultan who had his own governmental structure, with his own administrators headed by what they called the mentri bazar, who was in effect the prime minister of that particular Sultanic state. The mentri bazar was the man who really ran the state, the sultan was the ceremonial head and ruler, but really didn't have many substantive functions. I would say that the sultan of Johore, if I remember correctly, was somewhat of an exception to that rule. He was a bit more independent and feisty than the others.

I wanted also to say that the Consulate in Kuala Lumpur was responsible for the southern part of the Malayan Peninsular. I had a Foreign Service colleague in Penang who covered the Sultanic states of Kedah, Perak and Kelantan. I had Selangor, Trengganu, Pahang, Negri Sembilan, Malacca and Johore. I don't know why the distribution was so uneven, but

I had a much larger office than he. I think he was the only officer at his post. Larry Lutkins was consul at Penang at that time.

One thing I probably should start talking about now is the independence movement that was going on in Malaya, which was highly important and has gotten lost in the shuffle in this tape. The British were obviously at that point resigned to the fact that eventually Malaya would become independent. But they wanted to be sure that they would be independent in the image that they envisaged for it and not as a communist satellite. And don't forget that these were days just after China had been taken over by the Communists, North Korea had invaded South Korea, and Ho Chi-Minh and his Viet Minh were fighting the French. The common belief in those days was that the Soviet Comintern had orchestrated all these conflicts and that the Malayan conflict was part of the communist master plan to conquer the world.

Q: Well, they said it was.

VAN OSS: Yes. We all believed it.

In any event the British wanted to be sure that this guerrilla insurgency did not succeed. So they conceived this Briggs plan of creating new villages which were established not only for the protection of the squatters but also for their education. It would put them in contact for the first time with schools. There would be medical facilities. It would create a medium for conducting elections and for teaching people the rudiments of democracy.

But, as always, there were people in Malaya who felt the British weren't moving fast enough. There were a number of Malays and Chinese who felt that Britain should move faster towards giving up its hold over Malaya. Malaya was not a colony, incidentally, the Sultanic states were all protectorates. The only colonies were Penang and Malacca, the two settlements I mentioned earlier.

One very interesting person who was being groomed to lead an independent movement and take over the country was a man named Dato Onn bin Jafaar. Dato Onn had been the head of the United Malay National Organization (UMNO), which was a nationalist Malay movement. No Chinese members. While he was head of UMNO he was very popular. He was a good rabble rouser and potential leader. Also he was a favorite of Malcolm MacDonald who felt that he represented the voice of the future in Malaya.

The British made a great mistake. They felt they had to bolster Onn's status so they made him, as I recall, minister for home affairs in the government that existed at that time. In other words, they took him out of his role of nationalist leader and made him in effect a British bureaucrat and expected him to keep his leadership and following and remain the political force that he had been up to that time.

This was a naive thing that the British did constantly at that time. The minute they saw people who they thought were promising political figures whom they approved of, they tried to help them by giving them jobs as administrators, not realizing that although this might have improved their knowledge of how government works, the British were really giving them the “kiss of death.” They were destroying their political base among the masses, who didn't like the British or persons who collaborated with them.

As a result Dato Onn, who had been moving along up to this point as the British had hoped he would, was compromised with his base of popular Malay support. Part of the British vision was a cooperative venture between Malays and Chinese, because the Malays couldn't run the country alone. They didn't have the drive, or knowledge. They needed the help and support of the Chinese who did have the drive and were the businessmen, the pragmatists.

At one point Dato Onn resigned or lost the leadership of UMNO. He formed his own party, the Independence of Malaya Party. This was going to be a party which would cooperate with the Chinese and other ethnic groups. The main Chinese honcho of the period was

Tan Chen-lok, a wealthy person Malcolm MacDonald had cultivated. Tan did have a great deal of prestige among the Chinese community. But in forming this new party, Dato Onn, in trying to include all the factions in Malaya—the Chinese, Malays, Indians, etc—cut himself loose from the Malays and besides, did not win Tan Chen-lok over. In essence the only people who really supported him were the Indians, a very small minority.

Then the British gave him the final nudge to oblivion by appointing him minister for home affairs and giving him all these administrative duties. To cut a long story short, Dato Onn's image plummeted. He realized this and got crankier and crankier. I saw him many times and he would get madder and madder at life in general. He found himself in a situation that he just couldn't handle, couldn't control.

Tunku Abdul Rahman, an hereditary Malay prince, took over and was elected head of the United Malay National Organization. The British at first made light of Tunku Abdul Rahman because although he had been well educated he never got very good marks. He managed to get a law degree, but they scoffed at that. Some people considered him rather a clown. I found him a very nice guy. I didn't consider him politically very charismatic at that point, but I am not a Malay and Malays apparently did find him appealing because he became the head of UMNO, eventually formed some affiliation with Tan Chen-lok and the Chinese, and eventually took over as prime minister of Malaya when it got its independence in 1957. He became a tremendous force.

But at the time I was there this was not at all apparent. One knew he was in charge of UMNO but apart from being an awfully nice person he had not shown all that much political skill.

The British, as I say, didn't like him, but he was the one who ended up on top and they had to work with him eventually. All the people who became ministers remained bureaucrats. Dato Nik Kamil, for example, was the Mentri Bazar of Kelantan. He was a fine, very intelligent fellow. The British appointed him minister for something or other and he

eventually became ambassador to the United States. He had a fine career, but my point is that the British had probably envisaged him as an eventual prime minister and he never quite blossomed into that.

I want to say something about Norman Cleaveland, the head of Pacific Tin Company. He had been in Malaya for a long time. He had seen, long before the British, that whatever was going on in Malaya was something important and dangerous and something that had to be watched carefully. In the 1947-48 period a gentleman named Gent was the British High Commissioner. When the first evidence of terrorist activity took place, some tin miners, including Norman Cleaveland, and some rubber plantation owners came to Gent and said that something had to be done. He said, “Are you gentleman sure that you are treating your laborers properly?” He thought the guerrilla uprising was just a labor movement.

Well, Norman Cleaveland lost patience, chartered a large plane, bought weapons I think with his own money, flew them in and armed his miners. As a result they survived and were not taken over or run over by the guerrillas. Sir Gent was replaced by Sir Henry Gurney, who knew very well what was going on and who was responsible in the first instance for the policies that eventually Sir Gerald Templar carried through to a successful conclusion.

Norman Cleaveland was really a great fellow. He had been in the back field on Ernie Nevers' undefeated football team at Stanford, graduating in 1924. He had been a member of the first and only, up to that point, Olympic U.S. rugby team, going to the Olympics in France. The team eventually won the gold medal.

Norman's mother was one of the first women ever to go out to New Mexico. She settled in the Sante Fe area and wrote a book, which I think was called, “No Life For A Lady,” which has been very popular, has run through several editions and is still in print. He, himself, was a bachelor when we knew him in Malaya, in his late 40s. He had gained fame there

by rescuing some young lady who got caught on a field by a Brahman bull. He rushed over to the bull, grabbed it by the horns and wrestled it to the ground in true cowboy style, a technique he had learned in Santa Fe, having grown up in the far West.

He was a great admirer of Herbert Hoover, which will give you some idea of his political inclinations. I used to consider myself somewhat of a liberal in those days. We used to have great arguments. He used to take me on pig hunts. We would go out early in the morning from Kuala Lumpur with a group of other men, dogs and beaters. It was dark. I never could fire a gun accurately and went out just to get the atmosphere, although he made me carry my police positive .38 caliber revolver, just in case.

We would go into a hiding place in the bush while the beaters were beating up the pigs. Then Norman would get arguing about economic matters and what was wrong with the United States. His pet hate was Democratic Senator Symington because Symington in his Senate Committee in Washington accused the Malayan tin miners of “gouging” the American taxpayer. Of course, the price of tin was indeed high, but these tin miners were mining tin under rather difficult conditions. Tin was in great demand at that point so the price rose. I don't think the tin miners themselves had very much to do with it. Then Senator Lyndon Johnson echoed Symington's sentiments, to Norman's disgust.

Norman would get riled up over whatever the subject might be and you couldn't get him off the subject of tin, once he got started. So there we would be out in the boondocks of the jungle listening to the beaters in the distance, Norman declaiming what should be done with people like Symington, and a pig would jump out of the bush and run across our path and he would say, “Uh oh, there's a pig. Just a moment.” By the time he got his gun armed, the pig would be gone and he would resume his economic diatribe without a loss of breath.

He stayed in Malaya quite a long time after we left. How long exactly, I don't know. I think he was there when the country became independent in 1957. To our amazement he got

married while there in the late fifties to a girl who was at least 25 years younger than he. I think she was the daughter of a British admiral. They had several daughters. He kept a home in Sante Fe and one in England. At the moment they are separated. He is living in Sante Fe and is a very senior citizen, being in his early nineties. He is still full of fun, as feisty as ever and as conservative as ever. In my opinion he was the best that American enterprise can produce—honest, intelligent and courageous.

Q: I would like to talk a little about the Department. How interested was the Department in what was going on and what was your relationship with them? What were their directions to you considering what the British were doing?

VAN OSS: It is a little difficult for me to reconstruct the instructions that I got from them. I think they were pleased with the reporting we were doing and I think I was carrying out my mission. We were there to support the British. There was no question about that. We were to encourage the British in their efforts to lead this country into independence and we were to aid the British tangibly in any way we could.

One of my bosses was Phil Bonsal, I think he was the director of the Office of South Asian Affairs...he might have been deputy Assistant Secretary also...he came out and we had very cordial relations. While he was there I was a little bit peeved because Sir Gerald Templar asked him for helicopters and Bonsal magnanimously agreed to see what he could do. Even though I was a mere “youngster” at the time I thought that if Sir Gerald really had confidence in me he would have raised the helicopter issue with me so that I could have had a chance to help out. But these are the things that happen.

As I told you before, we were a subsidiary post to Singapore. I got along very well with Bill Langdon, but he didn't stay long as Consul General. His place was taken by Jack Goodyear, in an acting capacity. Jack felt very strongly that Kuala Lumpur should fit into the Singapore command structure and that I should follow his lead in my political reporting. I had had considerable experience with political reporting in China and in the work I had

done in the Department, with biographic intelligence and that sort of thing. Jack had never done political reporting and he was really listening to Malcolm MacDonald. Whenever what I said, reflecting my contacts, went against what he had heard from Malcolm MacDonald, he would pooh-pooh it. He would say, “Well, this isn't right.”

So we thoroughly irritated each other, although I liked the man and still do, but we didn't work together very well. I had my instructions to report directly to the Department, which I insisted on doing. My reports didn't go through him but I sent him copies of everything I did.

Then Chuck Baldwin came out as the regular Consul General. He was a much more amenable person and much broader gauged, at least from my point of view. I got along extremely well with him.

The only bane to my existence was in the USIS activity. The USIS man in Kuala Lumpur had to work under and through the USIS chief in Singapore, even though I had the right to report directly to the Department, he didn't. The USIS head in Singapore was named Elmer Newton, a very nice man but also very feisty, and with his own ideas. He had the impression that USIS was really the organization that carried out U.S. policy. He considered that consuls and consuls general were there to take care of Americans, to give visas, to report on economic matters, maybe military matters, but when it came to carrying out policies it was up to USIS to do that.

Q: Where did he get that idea?

VAN OSS: Well, I suppose from the idea that USIS is a spokesman for American policy and was in charge of cultural exchanges. For example, he took it upon himself to advise the Chinese in my district to beef up their labor union activities. I knew, from my contacts, that this was just asking for trouble. The Chinese Communists were trying to get their foothold in the unions and by beefing them up you were fertilizing the field in which communism might grow. In any event, it was not up to him to make that decision. He could

have a hand in it, yes, but this was a policy matter which should have been articulated in the Department and not by him blundering around in what I considered to be my area of responsibility.

This led to some unpleasant set-tos that he and I had. Nevertheless, I always respected the man. He was good, his heart was in the right place, but he just couldn't stand for what he considered interference by me in things he was doing, when he was really the one who was interfering in my work.

As far as the Desk people in the Department were concerned, Dick Poole, my predecessor was eventually on the Malaya Desk. We had very cordial relations and as far as I know he was satisfied with what I was producing. Ken Landon was another one back in Washington. Another person who eventually came out to Kuala Lumpur was Oscar Armstrong, a close friend of mine. He was a Chinese language officer who had been stationed in Singapore. The work load in Kuala Lumpur was really very heavy and we were far too small to handle it properly. Also I felt very strongly that...I was only a class 5 officer at the time when class 6 was the bottom rank...my job should have been held by an FSO-3, somebody who could pull rank a little more than I could as a young FSO-5. So I recommended that my successor be a more senior officer, especially if the place was going to become independent, so that he could operate a little more freely and without worrying too much about protocol and having to work with people who greatly outranked him.

This is not something that preoccupied me to any extent, it was just something that became obvious. The work load was extremely hard. I knew the office would have to grow and that unless the principal officer had a higher ranking it would be very difficult to assign experienced persons there. If my successor was not at least an FSO-3, he would be assigned relatively inexperienced officers under him, and thus wouldn't get the quality personnel I thought the place should have. Anyway, the Department assigned an FSO-2, Eric Kocher to replace me.

Q: Which would be a senior Foreign Service officer today.

VAN OSS: Yes, and it was in those days.

Q: You mentioned a number of famous American visitors, did any British royalty come?

VAN OSS: Not exactly royalty, but royal family yes. The Duchess of Kent, whose husband had died, came and brought the Duke of Kent, heir apparent, with her to attend some celebration. Their visit took a tremendous amount of time on everybody's part, the British especially. This was great stuff for them. They organized everything down to the last second. I can remember being with one of the organizers at some point along the parade route. He looked at his watch and said, “I reckon she will now be getting out of the gate at King's House.” We looked up and indeed her car was just being driven out of the gate at King's House.

Anne and I were invited to the receptions, and other events. We were given instructions on how our wives should curtsy, but I didn't think it was appropriate for the wife of an American official to curtsy so I suggested to Anne, who didn't want to either, that she simply bow her head as she shook hands to show that she was respectful, without being obsequious. And, indeed, that is what she did. But the wife of one of the British rubber planters, Headly Facer's wife, didn't curtsy as a matter of principle. She, being a British subject, got into hot water. The King's House people noted her act, and she was boycotted. She never went to another reception in the King's House. That shows how the British work.

And this protocol business was so annoying because all these people, these young officers...I was on good terms with most of them...I used to play water polo with them for example...but at a reception when the Duchess of Kent would come into the room these men would come in and officiously push everyone out of the way and say, “Make way for

her Royal Highness, the Duchess of Kent.” They didn't see anything amusing about it at all.

Speaking of British protocol, this is one of the less pleasant aspects you run into when you are in a British preserve. For example, the British Advisers...each of the Sultanic states had a British Adviser, or Resident. When he would visit the Kampongs and villages carrying out his duties, he would always wear a hat or a necktie. Not because he wanted to, but because this marked him as being different from the “natives.”

I remember very vividly one trip Anne and I took out to Trengganu, a Sultanic state on the east coast. I might say that Kuala Lumpur was essentially a modern city. It had Malay Muslim type architecture and things of that sort, but had all the conveniences...elevators, electricity, etc. Selangor was a fairly advanced Malay state, but when you went out to the east coast, Trengganu, you went out to Malaya as it always has been. There is where you see Malayan huts on poles to account for the high tide. The moon shines, the waters are sparkling, the women are in sarongs, the men wear their black Malay hats. Very colorful.

On this particular visit we stayed with the British Resident. I can't remember his name, but I do remember that his wife was a “Lady,” one of noble birth. He was very hospitable. He laid on a venture in which we were to go out in his yacht and motor up the coast, where Malay villages were having some sort of harvest festival on the shore. We would be picked up by a Malay canoe and brought through the surf to the shore where we would join the festivities. We approached the shore. It was dark, the middle of the night. We could see the bonfire burning brightly and people dancing around it. The first canoe came up and the Resident told me and a few others to get on board. We were brought in through the surf which was quite a hair raising experience. Then apparently the surf picked up so it was decided that it was too rough to unload the other passengers from the yacht. They would have to wait until the surf subsided.

Then as I was standing on the beach, I heard somebody say, “Oh, one of the row boats has come in from the yacht and it has capsized.” I didn't pay much attention to that and then someone said, “Oh, it is the Resident and he has some lady with him and they both capsized in the water.” I got a little nervous at this because I had been a lifeguard in my past and I know how difficult it is to bring an ordinary rowboat or dinghy through high surf. So I rushed to where this happened and there appeared before me Anne, looking like a drowned rabbit, and the Resident, equally moist, and a couple of his crewmen. Apparently they had decided before the warning came in that they would come to the shore by dinghy. They got caught by the waves and were lucky they didn't get hurt. I was quite angry. But I noticed the Resident did not have his necktie on. I said, “Well, I see that you have finally relented, you don't have your necktie.” He said, “Oh yes I do. Here it is,” and he pulled it dripping out of his pocket and put it on.

Trengganu was a delightful spot. It really was the Malaya of Somerset Maugham and myth. It was always pleasant. And I might add in general that it was always pleasant to travel and see other towns and villages. While I had little opportunity to do that in the early days because of the security situation, I had many opportunities our second year because security had become much, much better.

Q: So Templar was able to accomplish something with his safety villages?

VAN OSS: Yes. These villages were extremely successful. That is why, I'm sure, they were adopted years later for the Vietnam scene. The British became very much more efficient. Templar was a superb leader. In fact, he is one of the finest leaders I have been associated with. Head and shoulders above most of the people in similar positions that I have run into. He had a very good chief of police, Arthur Young, who had been the chief of police in the Borough of London, the original old city of London. He was a big 6'6” fellow. He taught the Malay policemen to help Chinese women across the street, go unarmed and treat people civilly. He tried to make London bobbies out of them, and succeeded to a certain extent. Their relations with the populace, which had been very dicey before

that time, especially since the policemen were mainly Malays and the population was at least half Chinese, became extremely good. Also the British trained a lot of home guard people in the new villages to carry arms and build up their own little security forces. They eventually became quite successful. They weren't too successful in the beginning, of course, because the people were still scared of the guerrillas who would approach a settlement in force and terrorize people.

I haven't said much about the rubber plantations, but they were very interesting too. They were highly organized, very efficient.

Q: Who owned them?

VAN OSS: Mainly British, but there was one large Belgian plantation. I don't think we Americans had any rubber plantations out there.

Q: No Firestone?

VAN OSS: I don't remember any. I don't think so. Tin, yes, and iron. Well, the iron mountain near Kuantan was owned by an Australian, but had an American engineer who was chief of the operation.

Q: You mentioned that the Malays were Muslim.

VAN OSS: Yes, the Malays were all Muslim.

Q: And the Chinese?

VAN OSS: The Chinese were a mixture of Buddhists, Christians, and Taoists. They were not a particularly religious group. The Chinese had their own schools, their own communities. They were quite exclusive.

The Indians were a force to be contended with. There were a number of Indians and Ceylonese in the government.

But the Chinese were very exclusive and wanted to be taught in their own language. They felt their education was quite as good or even better than the British on the one hand and the Malay on the other.

Q: The Malay language is related to Thai is it?

VAN OSS: No, it is related to Indonesian. I was supposed to learn Malay and I tried, but all my contacts were with English-speaking people so I really had very little opportunity, except when I was traveling, to speak Malay. The traveling that I did was usually in the second half of my stay there and I just never did get any degree of fluency in or even working knowledge of Malay.

Q: The Chinese probably spoke Chinese, Malay and English.

VAN OSS: Yes.

Q: How widely was English spoken by the Malay?

VAN OSS: Oh, I would say in the country, not widely at all, but among the people that I met, the officials, all spoke fine English.

Q: Was English taught in the schools?

VAN OSS: Yes, in many of the schools.

Q: Was it compulsory?

VAN OSS: As far as I can remember, yes. A large percentage of Malays went to school. The new villages opened up all sorts of possibilities for education that hadn't existed before.

Q: Before that they were scattered?

VAN OSS: Yes, along the rivers and forests.

Q: In those scattered areas was there any kind of farming or did they live on fish, etc.?

VAN OSS: I would say there was a lot of fishing. I don't really recall much in the way of farming. They must have grown some crops.

Q: They ate rice.

VAN OSS: Yes, they ate rice. My orientation was almost 100 percent political and military. While I had to sign everything that Dick Peters and Bob Myers did, of course, I can't say that I knew all that much about the economics of the country. They had poultry, fresh vegetables, coconuts, fruits, the usual tropical food products.

Q: Some place rice was probably grown or imported.

VAN OSS: Oh, I think it was imported largely. I don't think...well maybe they did produce rice. I am afraid my memory doesn't help much on that.

Just to conclude, my time in the Federation was thoroughly enjoyable. The people were extremely pleasant...Malays, Chinese, British, Indians. It was one of the nicer posts. The story has a happy ending because Malaya did reach its independence and did become a viable entity. It had its problems when it united with Singapore, but then it separated because Tunku Abdul Rahman did not want to have a majority of Chinese in the new Malaysia. Singapore with its overwhelming number of Chinese put the numbers of Chinese over the Malays and they didn't like each other. Lee Kuan Yew, a bright, aggressive, highly

educated Chinese and easy going Tunku Abdul Rahman were not exactly soul mates and didn't get along. But they parted in a friendly way and the two countries still work closely together to this day.

But in contrast to some of the African countries where I have served since, which have gone through all sorts of troubled times since they have become independent, I think free Malaya has done relatively well.

Q: Certainly better than Burma for example.

VAN OSS: Yes. From what little I know about Burma, the psychological atmosphere in Malaya is much more benign. In Burma, from what little I could learn when I visited Rangoon in 1947, everybody was scared to death of the Burmese, of the security situation. I really can't say anything about it but I gathered that it was an entirely different atmosphere. Heavens, shortly before I arrived in Rangoon virtually the entire cabinet had been rubbed out, machine gunned to death. Malaya was much more benign, ...with the exception of the guerrilla insurgency which was tough and rough...but today I think it is one of the pearls of Southeast Asia.

Q: So you left in 1953 with some regret.

VAN OSS: Left with great regret, yes, but with happy memories. And I have never been back.

Q: This is the continuation of the interview with Hendrik Van Oss. Today is June 13, 1991. The first topic today is Mr. Van Oss' period of posting in Uganda. He was Consul General and Principal Officer in Kampala from June 1960 to September 1962.

How did you happen to get an assignment to Uganda after all the service you had in the Far East?

VAN OSS: After the Far East we went to Vienna for three years and after Vienna I went into the Department's Civil Aviation Division. Promotions were coming slowly in those days and I was still a class-4 officer so I qualified for language training or special training of other sorts. I thought I might as well make a benefit out of adversity so I volunteered for African area specialization. I was accepted in 1959 and sent to SAIA at Johns Hopkins in Washington and had a year of special African area studies.

I was assigned to Bamako, Mali, a new post that I was supposed to open. Nobody knew anything about Mali. The Department had absolutely nothing on it and we were resigned to our fate, but then, fortunately, I was promoted, became a class-3 officer and as a result the Department changed my assignment to Kampala, which was already a firmly established post.

Uganda is really a very sad story. It is a story of what might have been. What it was when I was there was not what it eventually became. When I was there it was a very promising country in the last stages before independence. The British were doing a very good job in preparing the Ugandans for independence. There was no acrimony to speak of between the African population and the British...I was going to say colonial masters, but they weren't. Great Britain had, as you know if you read your history, a special relationship with Uganda. It had treaties with the four main kingdoms and had a special relationship with them. They were protectorates, not really full fledged colonies.

Uganda was a country with considerable promise. It had very fine agricultural possibilities. It had possibly the thickest top soil in the world, I think at least 12 feet of top soil. Everything was very, very fertile. If you stuck wooden poles in the ground to shore up your rose bushes, the poles themselves would sprout. Ugandans would stick palm fronds into the ground lining the streets when their Kabaka or king passed; many of the fronds would take root. So the agricultural potential was considerable. Uganda grew lots of coffee, cotton and had all the other tropical commodities...sugar, palm oil, etc.

Also it had a very healthy climate. Most of the country was over 3,000 feet high. Our house was about 4,500 feet above sea level. The climate could get hot during the day, but at night it usually cooled off and was so chilly that one couldn't give cocktail parties outside without wearing sweaters.

The people of Uganda were relatively well educated. There was probably a higher number of college graduates in Uganda than any other African country, with the possible exception of Nigeria and Ghana. There was a university, Makerere University, which had been established in the twenties and which was a small edition of Oxford. It had different colleges, or houses, students ate in gowns, etc. So, it was based on the British educational system, which, of course, is a very good one.

It had a very strong traditional structure. When discovered about a hundred years before, and when the British first came in 1860, Uganda was not an entity. It consisted of different states or tribes. In the main there were four kingdoms...the kingdoms of Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro and Ankole. Each kingdom had a hereditary king.

In the case of Buganda, which was the largest, richest, and most advanced kingdom, the king or Kabaka could trace his ancestry back at least 600 years. The kingdoms had court customs, their own government structures...especially Buganda, which had its own government even at the time that I was there.

The British were preparing them very carefully for independence. They had established a legislative council which later became known as the National Assembly. They had held an election and had elected members, with a few appointed members as well and they were easing in to the full self government stage when we first got there. The Ugandans would argue and debate legislation in their legislative council. The proceedings were based on the way things are done in Parliament in London. Members bowed to the Speaker on taking their seats. In the intervals members would go upstairs for tea and members of rival

parties would joke with each other. It was a very pleasant atmosphere. Everybody seemed to be friendly and anxious to start the process of self government.

Historically there were no white settlers in Uganda so no white settler problems to worry about. There were about 10,000 whites in the country, but none was allowed to own land. In other words, land could not be alienated to non-Africans. So there was no question of white settlers wanting their own government, or unilateral independence as in Southern Rhodesia.

All the elements seemed in place for Uganda to develop into a successful, independent entity. But things went wrong a few years after I left. So I can't really tell you anything about that except what has already appeared in many papers. I just have to remind you that Milton Obote, the prime minister, ejected the Kabaka, who was president of the first independent government, and drove him into exile. He had to flee for his life. Then Idi Amin, commanding general of the Ugandan army, deposed Obote and perpetrated the horrors we have read about. Then, with the help of Tanzania, Amin was driven out, and after several interim presidents, Vincent Lule and Godfrey Binaisa, Obote returned to power, committing his share of atrocities. Finally, after more civil strife, Obote was again deposed, and Museveni took over as prime minister or president. Perhaps the greatest horror of all now is one of the most severe AIDS epidemics in all of Africa.

So, here was a hopeful, promising country in every sense of the word and just everything went wrong.

Q: Was there any hint of what might occur while you were there?

VAN OSS: Oh, there were many hints that you could look back on and put your finger on in hindsight, yes. So-called tribalism was always strong. Uganda was divided into about 11 districts or provinces. Each district had a predominate tribe...if I use tribe it is not in a demeaning sense, it is just an easier expression because tribalism is the curse of Africa and was certainly in evidence in those days. In the sixties, for example, the Baganda in

Buganda, which is the largest entity of Uganda, the one that is ruled by the Kabaka, were the best educated, richest, farthest advanced in almost every respect, and as such were the objects of envy and hatred by virtually all other tribal units. In fact there had been a long tradition of warfare in the past between Buganda and Bunyoro.

Q: Didn't Buganda want a separate status?

VAN OSS: Yes, Buganda had a special treaty with the British which set them up in a special category. They had their own government, their own parliament, their own prime minister. It was a government that functioned under the Ugandan government in theory but in actuality it functioned pretty much independently. In fact, in December 1960, the Baganda declared unilateral independence. Everybody simply ignored this. The British continued to collect taxes, and to give the annual monetary support that they always had given to the Baganda. There was a lot of drumming on the night of independence and that was about the only celebration. Oh, the Buganda ministers would pay lip service to their independence and say that they don't pay any attention to the Uganda government. In fact there was no change in status. But Buganda always felt itself to have a special relationship with the British and be deserving of special consideration by the British.

Q: Was Buganda the largest territory and was it part of the area that included Kampala?

VAN OSS: Yes. Buganda is the central portion north of Lake Victoria. It is an inner core that covers about a third of the area of Uganda.

Q: Were they about a third of the population as well?

VAN OSS: As I recall, roughly a third out of a total of about 7 or 8 million people.

Q: So most of the people in Kampala would be Baganda.

VAN OSS: I suppose you are right, but there was a large contingent of bureaucrats who were not Baganda.

My point in all this...we were trying to think of hints of trouble to come...the Baganda didn't get along well with other tribal areas. There was a saying that although the Baganda were the richest and the cleverest, Uganda would never be governed by a Muganda, it would always be a northerner who governs Uganda. And indeed this may well prove to be true, Obote was a Langi from Lira and Idi Amin was a Kakwa from West Nile, so they certainly were northerners. The Baganda have not really had control over the entire country since Uganda's independence.

So had we paid more attention and taken tribalism a little more seriously at the time we were there, we might have foreseen what was going to happen. But this was all submerged pretty much in the preparations for independence. People seemed to be working together regardless of tribe in the legislative council. The underlying animosities simply were not very much in evidence.

Now there was a great deal of animosity in the beginning between Obote, when he was president of the Uganda Peoples Congress (UPC), and the Kabaka. They had gotten together a few months before the final election, immediately prior to the independence ceremonies when the Ugandans would take over the government. The Kabaka's group called Kabaka Yekka formed an alliance with the Uganda Peoples Congress and defeated the Democratic Party, which became the opposition party. So Obote and the Kabaka were in cahoots for a while and were working together. The agreement was that the Kabaka would become the president, or the ceremonial head of the country, and Obote would be the prime minister, or the executive head. That took place and stayed in position for a year or so. But the personalities of Obote and the Kabaka were such that the partnership could never last, although this was not apparent at the time. If we had analyzed this arrangement

more carefully, we probably should have foreseen even while I was still there that this marriage of convenience could never last.

So, yes, the elements were in place for the destruction of Uganda, but they seemed to be in eclipse and all the signs were positive as of the time I left.

On the positive side again, before we get away from this...other positive elements were the fact that there seemed to be complete racial harmony in the country. By that I mean there were a number of interracial marriages among quite well-known people. The English Director of the Kampala museum was married to a Kiganda woman. The head of the Aga Khan school, Brendan McCourt, was married to a Chagga from Tanganyika. There was a great deal of social intercourse between whites and blacks.

Also on the positive side there was a very strong women's movement. There were some very powerful women there. Pouma Kissosonkole who started life as a Xhosa in South Africa was married to Chris Kissosonkole, a prominent Buganda notable. She was really an important official in the international women's movement. Rebecca Mulire was another very impressive woman. Sara Entiko was a member of the legislative council and married to a Tanganyikan artist. There were a number of other well-educated, strong women. In other words, they were not all by any means sitting in the entrances to huts and grinding meal.

One of the fascinating things about Buganda, I thought, was the Kabaka's court. The Kabaka at this time was Freddy Mutesa II who was a young man in his late thirties or early forties. He had been exiled briefly in the early 1950s. That was a traumatic experience for the Baganda and he was eventually brought back in triumph. Among his people he was very well regarded and even revered. He was the spirit and the soul of Buganda. When he was in a room no Muganda could be in a higher place than the Kabaka. In other words, if he was seated, his subjects coming into the same room had to crawl in on their knees.

This was always an astonishing thing for visitors from the States to see; even the Kiganda Minister of Finance had to come in on his knees.

The Kabaka, himself, was a quiet, soft-spoken young man. He was also very arcane and very devious. He rarely came out and said exactly what he meant on anything. If you asked him a question he would mumble, “Weeeeeell, yes,” or “Hmmmmm, perhaps.” He would speak in such a way that you could draw all kinds of inferences, but couldn't pin down exactly what his views were.

One thing that he was very clear on, however, was his opposition to the East African Federation. The East African Federation (EAF) was a brain child of the British who thought that East Africa would be a better economic and political unit with Kenya, Tanganyika and Uganda joined together as three partners. While some of the Ugandans were not all that opposed to EAF, the Baganda were. The Kabaka was definitely opposed to it. The reason, I think behind his opposition, was that he felt Kenya was dominated by white settlers and that if Uganda entered into an East African Federation with Kenya, eventually the whites would extend their control over the whole area. He didn't want that. So in his own way he was an ardent African nationalist. But he also was an elitist. He was convinced of the superiority of his tribe, of his nation, and he did not contemplate lightly any situation developing in Uganda in which Buganda took a secondary role.

Q: Wasn't Nyerere in favor of this Federation?

VAN OSS: Yes, Nyerere was a very foresighted, intelligent man. He was educated at Makerere University and I think he, in principle, thought the East African Federation was the way to go.

Q: I just wondered if Nyerere's positive attitude influenced the Kabaka's negative attitude?

VAN OSS: No, I don't think so. I think the Kabaka came to this on his own. He was also very clever. He was a graduate of Sandhurst and spoke perfect English. If you threw a

blanket over his head and heard him talk you wouldn't know he was an African, which is most unusual. Almost 99 percent of the Africans have a distinctive accent of one sort or another when they speak English.

To go to the Kabaka's palace to see him was quite an experience. His palace was a series of very large wooden and thatched-roofed structures. Very elegant, but still basic. There was always drumming going on and music of some sort. The drumming changed whenever the Kabaka would move from one building to another so that somebody in the know could tell exactly where the Kabaka was at all times.

The Kabaka, himself, spoke in a very low voice. My hearing is not the most acute in the world so I was constantly straining to hear what he had to say and the fact that he never spoke very directly on any subject made it extremely difficult to know what he really did say. I suspect that this was done purposely, to give himself the utmost flexibility on every conceivable subject.

There were a number of courtyards and gardens in the palace complex. Whenever he had a reception at night there would be fountains bubbling and a band playing in the background. These receptions would take place in different parts of the palace grounds on different occasions. If you shut your eyes and just listened to the ambiance and the sound you might have thought you were in the Buckingham Palace grounds. That might be a little farfetched, but it wasn't all that different. His ministers were all dressed in dark suits and neckties as was he. These were very dignified, rather pleasant occasions; more European in character than African.

Q: When you arrived in Kampala in 1960, what were the conditions that you found? What was our Consulate like?

VAN OSS: There was really nothing unusual about the Consulate. It had just been elevated into a Consulate General so I gloried in that promotion. The housing was quite decent. We first lived on Kololo Hill. We moved very shortly to another place on Makindi

Hill, which is right outside of town and one of the nicest places I have ever been in. It was a bungalow, a typical, old, British style bungalow located on top of a hill. We had nine acres of garden and forest around the bungalow. It was the hill that the Kabaka was born on. Our bungalow had a beautiful view of the city of Kampala, Lake Victoria, and surrounding flat top hills. It had a beautiful climate, cool and invigorating. Really one of the most pleasant places I have ever been in in my life.

That is not to say that we didn't have some rather strange experiences. One of them being that our bungalow was in the path of an army ant march. We saw it coming because snakes, insects, and rodents came out of the bushes in flight so we knew something was happening.

Q: You mean they were getting out of the way?

VAN OSS: Yes. Then the ants came. They don't come in a broad path, they come in a narrow line about two inches wide and there are thousands and thousands and thousands of them. In fact, after they have passed, the grass is worn away in the two inch wide path. In this case, they came right at the house. We had surrounded the house with ant repellent and this probably deflected them from going inside. But they were underneath the foundations, in all the crevasses, all over the place. And you could easily see how a baby, for example, could be just consumed by these ants...they get into the lungs, nose, eyes, crawl all over.

Q: That is why the animals were fleeing.

VAN OSS: Oh yes, any living thing in the path of one of these army ant migrations is in for bad trouble.

Q: And there is no stopping them?

VAN OSS: No stopping them. You can deflect them by means of chemicals, I suppose, but it is hard. We were lucky. The one good thing about it is that they go in this rather narrow line so they don't disperse all over the place, unless you step on that path. Then you disperse them and they crawl all over you.

Also once a black mamba snake slithered into the house. I was at the office and the gardeners killed it. My wife was quite excited at that.

We saw monkeys up on Makindi. There were wonderful trails to walk on. There were probably leopards too, but I never saw one.

In any event, our accommodations were basically fine, nothing to complain about. They were not modern and were not luxurious, but they were just comfortable and pleasant. In fact everything about the post was pleasant.

We had about, in our heyday, five officers in the Consulate General, five in AID and several in USIS. Then we had about two dozen local employees, Ugandan nationals of one sort or another. So all together there were about three dozen of us at our peak. When we turned into an Embassy after independence, that number expanded by quite a good deal. When I first got there it was considerably smaller than that.

Our relations with the State Department were splendid, I think. The Department could not have been more helpful in every respect until the very end when they reassigned me somewhere; I didn't like that very much. But apart from that I can't complain about my treatment.

The head of the African Bureau, the Assistant Secretary, was Joe Satterthwaite. After Kennedy was elected, Governor Mennen Williams of Michigan was appointed. Mennen Williams was almost worth a tape by himself, but I won't go into that because I am sure many people have known him. As you know he was a presidential candidate. The good thing about Soapy Williams was that he was a fighter, he was interested in Africa and he

did more to put Africa on the map than any other American. He had his weaknesses. He was egotistical, a typical politician in many ways. But he was also as strong as a horse and had the best will in the world. He was a good man to work under in most ways.

The Desk officers that I had were all good, sympathetic and cooperative. So I can't complain about relations with the Department. When we had personnel difficulties they supported us. When we needed people, they assigned them. And it is interesting to note that my number two...when I went out there it was a fellow by the name of Hap Funk, who was later killed in an automobile accident in Kenya, but he was a splendid officer, one of the best I have ever had. His place was taken by a gentleman named Hank Cohen, who now is Assistant Secretary for African Affairs in the Department. He was equally fine and certainly slated for stardom. I can't really say that I had anything to do with his later eminence. But there is one thing I did do for him; I taught him how to use a stick shift on a land rover, something he hadn't learned up to that time.

Q: How about your national employees? Were they from different tribes?

VAN OSS: They were from every conceivable tribe. I would say the dominant group was from the Baganda. But we had Aggrey Willis a Luo related to Oginga Odinga, one of the main African leaders in Kenya. We had some Indian employees. My driver Athmani, as I recall was a Muslim from Toro. Our own household staff...our laundry amah was from Toro. The head “boy” or head servant, was a Muganda, etc. We made a point of not having them all from one ethnic group. We also made it a point of not separating them. They each had their own place to live next to our bungalow, not very elegant quarters, but clean with modern bathroom facilities. While they probably would have preferred to be farther apart from each other because of their tribal differences, I didn't pay too much attention, feeling that by example we should down-play ethnic differences.

I might say also that all of us in the African Bureau in those days...the African Bureau really didn't come into existence until about 1959. There had been people working on

Africa like Joe Palmer, Bill Witman, etc. But these were assigned to the Near East Bureau. Some of the African countries were handled by the desk officers of their colonial masters. It was only around 1959 that Satterthwaite became the first Assistant Secretary for African Affairs. I think I was part of the first group of African specialists after the original few like Joe Palmer and Bill Witman who specialized in Africa affairs years before anybody else.

Q: Mike Hoyt came in.

VAN OSS: Yes, I remember him.

So, our relations with the Ugandan employees, I thought, were very good. They came to our parties. They were treated like everybody else. Unfortunately their salaries were not very high, but that was true of Foreign Service locally hired personnel all over the world in those days. The Department tried to economize by paying local wages.

Q: I can remember doing the local wage surveys we had to do every couple of years.

VAN OSS: Yes, we made a point of not out-bidding the average organization in the country where we were stationed, because that could lead to hard feelings and enhance our negative image as rich Americans.

While we are talking about relations with the people, we had a very successful cultural exchange program in Uganda. The U.S. government sponsored some really top grade entertainment that we brought to Uganda. For example, we had Holiday On Ice, which came in with a huge lift van filled with special ice making equipment. You must understand that most Africans had never seen ice or at least most in Kampala had never seen ice. There may be ice on the top of the Mountains of the Moon in the western part of Uganda, but there certainly is none in Kampala. So we had an arena, a basketball court I think it was, filled with ice and lots of Ugandan spectators sitting in the bleachers. As the first two members of the chorus came out and glided onto the ice one heard an “Ohhhhhh” of wonderment from the audience. I think the audience appreciated those first two slides

more than they did all the other intricate skating and acrobatics that went on afterwards. That first impression of gliding on ice was like magic to them.

We also had the Golden Gate Quartet. This was interesting because many Ugandans came up to me afterwards and asked, “Are those American blacks?” I said, “Yes.” And they said, “Are you sure they are not American whites who are made up to look like blacks?” I said, “No, they are genuine American blacks.” At the party we gave for them Ugandans would come up to one of the singers and would say something to the effect, “You are our brother.” And the singer would say, “No, I am not. I am an American.” This was before American blacks thought much about returning to their roots. They were proud to be Americans and we were proud of them.

We had Louis Armstrong. He came with his combo and gave several concerts. He was sponsored by the U.S. government. We probably made a mistake, but we accepted Pepsi Cola's offer to stage the event because the Consulate General didn't have any money for such purposes. Pepsi Cola hired the football stadium and put out all sorts of advertisement. We told Pepsi Cola that we would not tolerate any active commercialization at the concert, but they were welcome to have it generally known that they were sponsoring it. Of course Louis Armstrong was not thoroughly briefed on that point and after he said his guttural good night to everybody as he did after all his concerts at home, he said, “Good night all, good night all, drink your Pepsi Cola.” I had to ask him afterwards not to say that again and he agreed not to.

We took Armstrong and his wife to see the Kabaka. He had a singer with him, a very corpulent female whose name I have forgotten. She did a lot of gymnastics while singing and at that altitude it was apparently too much of a strain, because in Kenya later during the middle of her performance she keeled over and died. Well, in any event she was still alive in Uganda and she and Louis and his wife, and I think one other went with me to call on the Kabaka. They were very anxious to meet “King Freddy,” as they called him.

King Freddy received them in his palace. Various Buganda officials who were great Louis Armstrong fans came into the royal chamber on their knees, and Louis' eyes just popped out of his head when he saw that. At one point the Kabaka, who was amused by all this, trying to make conversation said, “Well, Mr. Armstrong, to what do you attribute your perpetual youthfulness and enthusiasm” Louis Armstrong replied, “Oh, King Freddy, I attribute it to Ex-Lax. Every night after dinner I take Ex-Lax and my wife does too.” The Kabaka gave an embarrassed smile—he didn't quite know how to handle that one. Anyway, Louis' visit was an overwhelming success.

We also had an interesting boxing program. One of the American AID employees, an American named Mitch Biedul, was a former boxer and boxing coach. If there is any sport that the Ugandans like besides soccer and wrestling, it is boxing. They had several amateurs who went quite far in one of the Olympics. Mitch Biedul became their coach. While we were there we invited some American Golden Glove boxers out to box the Ugandans. We had a great evening of boxing. The Americans won two matches, one was tied and they lost a match...a steal I might add, as the officials were heavily prejudiced in Uganda's favor. But never mind, it made for a friendly evening.

What else did we have? We had a conference on African-American poetry. Langston Hughes showed up for that. I had the pleasure of meeting and chatting with him. There were a number of other well-known African poets and black American academicians and writers. It was a very interesting event.

That was really a golden period for our relations with Africa...this early period right before and during the final moments before independence. It was a time of hope for Africans and Americans alike. We in the African Bureau had high hopes that the Africans in some way could find a short cut to stability, could learn from the experiences of the West and in effect could achieve instant democracy instead of having to go through a long period of apprenticeship, trial and error and several hundred years of history to accomplish it. And, of course, we were wrong, but we had high hopes in those days. A lot of that was

due to Soapy Williams' enthusiasm, combativeness and success in convincing the U.S. government to provide aid and money. I don't think we have been that successful since in helping Africa.

One of the most important things we did during this great period of enthusiasm was to put into being a very large program of providing teachers for East Africa. I think we sent something like 250 young Americans, all college graduates, some of them with teaching certificates, most of them without. The understanding was that those without teaching certificates would take a full school term of special instruction in British teaching techniques at Makerere University. In my own opinion I didn't think they needed that; I thought they were perfectly able to go out at once and teach. But the British are a little bit stuffy about their education system and tended to look down on our American system. They didn't accept our teaching standards or teaching certificates, so they insisted on this training period. We agreed because we felt it was worth it to get these young Americans in.

So for the better part of a semester, maybe it was two semesters, we had dozens and dozens of Americans at Makerere University studying alongside the African students. They really put a new dimension into Makerere. They did all sorts of things...put on plays, organized extra curricular events, more than carried their weight. Eventually they dispersed to schools throughout East Africa. About a third stayed in Uganda and the rest went to Kenya and Tanzania.

That was a highly successful program. Eventually it was taken over by the Peace Corps. While it was going on a special supervisor, I think his name was Fielding or Fields, came out from Columbia University Teachers College, the sponsoring organization at home. The U.S. government supplied the money, but Columbia Teachers College picked the students and supervised them in the early stages. It was a great experience for everybody...for me, the students, the Ugandans...I think it was very helpful to all. I don't know what eventually

happened to the program, whether the Peace Corps sustained it. I suspect that the whole thing fell apart during the Idi Amin catastrophe.

One of the delights of being in Uganda at this period was that we could do a lot of traveling. Uganda is a beautiful country. Each district has its own characteristics which, I think, account for the differences between the tribal units. You have the Mountains of the Moon in the west, savannah like country in the south, and the hilly country in the Kigesi area, etc.

I did a lot of traveling and was always happy to be on the road. Accommodations were usually reasonably acceptable and the people were always extremely friendly. There were many interesting things to see. For example, in a place called Soroti, up in the northern area, there was a school for the blind which was run by a Nun, Sister Viani. I used to visit the school every time I was in the area because I found it so appealing and impressive. These youngsters, who were mostly born blind, had they not been taken in by the school might have perished because Ugandans in the villages don't know what to do with imperfect human beings. If somebody has had polio, for example, they crawl around and are fed, but a blind youngster is left to his own resources often getting into life threatening difficulties.

The school for the blind must have had five or six dozen blind youngsters of all ages. They were taught all sorts of things...how to play musical instruments, dance. It was really an emotional experience to see these little kids playing on drums, tubas, violins and dancing around. Granted these were British country dances, not African dances, but it was an interesting thing to have in that country.

There were also a number of monasteries run by monks...a number of American monks as a matter of fact. They were always great fun, were delighted to see somebody from the States and to have a new face appear in their midst.

Out in Toro Father McCauley, an American, was ordained a Bishop while I was there. They had a special ceremony for him. He was very well-known and a very fine man.

The northeastern portion of the country is a very wild area called Karamoja. The Karamojong, I guess, were the most primitive people in Uganda, if not in Africa. The men run around without any clothes except for a dark blanket or cloak. They have very elaborate headdresses, caking their hair with mud and cow dung and then letting the whole mess harden and painting it in elaborate colors. They sleep with a special stand under their necks so that the hair will not be mussed while they're asleep. They keep the headdresses intact for as long as they last, which is quite a considerable length of time. They are very interesting people, cattle raisers.

The real old Ugandan hands, the British who had been in Uganda all their lives and loved it, liked that part of Uganda the best because it is the least changed. It is closest to what has always existed there.

Q: Nomadic?

VAN OSS: Nomadic, although a lot of them have settled around Moroto and have started to engage in agricultural pursuits. The Catholic missionaries have tried to teach them that. The main problem is that the young Karamojong and the Turkana in neighboring Kenya have standing feuds. The Turkana come and raid the cattle of the Karamojong and then the Karamojong young men go out and blood their spears by taking cattle back from the Turkana and killing a few Turkanas here and there in the process.

That, in fact, is where Idi Amin apparently got his first fame. After Ugandan independence the Uganda government wanted to put a stop to all this nonsense of raids and counter raids between the Karamajong and the Turkana. So after the Turkana committed one of their annual raids the Ugandan government sent up a detachment of soldiers under the command of then-buck sergeant Amin. He took the detachment into Turkana and

absolutely razed a Turkana village. There was quite a bit of flak over that. It was the first time he had come to anybody's attention. This was after I had left so I have the story second hand.

I did travel to Karamoja so I saw it. In fact, I went to all corners of the country and was interested in all of them. There was another interesting group in the eastern part of Uganda on the flanks of Mount Elgon, the Sebei. At one point, these people declared their “independence” and were allowed to become a separate district. However, the Sebei treated this as being independent. They held an independence ceremony and I went up there. There was an American anthropologist who was spending his time doing research in Sebei country. That was highly interesting.

So I have done my share of African dancing along with all the others at various ceremonies.

There was one fascinating place on the Kagera River, which flows into Lake Victoria near the border with Tanzania and has as good a claim as any to being the ultimate source of the Nile, that we were very fond of visiting. It was run by an Italian lady named Toni Nuti, who was a hunter and a well- known character in the area. She and her husband had planned to build a hotel on an island in the middle of the Kagera River. He had died before the hotel was finished. In order to stay alive she took in paying guests in her own house. She had four guest bedrooms with baths.

I used to go down there whenever I was in the area and would often take the family down. Toni was a lover of animals and had her own pet antelopes, civet cat in a cage in her window, a sort of pet hippopotamus, although she couldn't get anywhere near him, who made his home on the island and whom she called Lord Nelson. You could get up to about fifty yards of Lord Nelson and then it would begin to show signs of hostility and if you were wise you would beat a hasty retreat. Toni Nuti was a great character, a fine woman, but

of the old school. Definitely a colonial type, but still great fun and somebody well worth knowing.

Speaking of that part of Uganda, if you go over a little bit you get to the southernmost tip of Uganda or Kigesi which borders on Rwanda. Shortly before, while we were still in Uganda, neighboring Rwanda erupted into civil war and the lower class Hutu laid waste to the aristocratic Watusi. A lot of Watusi fled across the border into Uganda and camped in the southern part of Kigesi. These refugees were in bad shape. They were the typical Watusi, tall, slender, good looking people. We (the U.S. government) sent a lot of flour down there to feed the refugees. I took some of it down myself and presented it to the refugees making a little public relations act, taking pictures, etc.

One interesting thing was that the flour was made from sorghum and was yellow in color. The refugees didn't want to eat it because the flour they were accustomed to was white. One of our AID officers from Kenya who was helping in the presentation took it upon himself to explain that the sorghum was a perfectly good flour, so good that we fed it to our cattle in the U.S. I don't remember how I got over that one, but some way or other I persuaded them that while it may be true that cattle ate sorghum, it was also consumed by the best people in the United States and was perfectly decent, acceptable, edible flour. They did eventually eat it and were happy to have it.

Q: Can you tell us a little bit about the political situation in Uganda during this time?

VAN OSS: That is a good question. I suppose you could divide the political situation into two general parts. The first was the series of events that concerned the relationship between Buganda and the rest of Uganda. The second was what you might call the striving for independence and the movement toward independence in Uganda as a whole, which was really more important and more interesting to the outside world.

As to the first, when I first arrived in Kampala I was paying my calls on various Ugandan government officials and decided to pay calls on certain Bugandan officials as well

because I knew they were very proud and would feel slighted if I didn't. So I made an arrangement to see Michael Kintu, who was then Katikero, or prime minister of Buganda. I frankly admit that I was not thoroughly enough briefed on this point or I would have handled it a little bit differently. What happened was that when I went to see Kintu, he ushered me into a room where there were a number of other gentlemen sitting. It turned out that he was right in the middle of a Buganda cabinet meeting. He had summoned his cabinet to receive the American representative. I had not been pre-warned and had no idea that he was going to do this. It had not occurred to me that this would present any problem whatsoever. So, I went in, nonetheless, shook hands and said “Hello” to everybody. The first question was asked by Amos Sempa, the Buganda Finance Minister, a small, sharp, very chauvinistic Bugandan. He asked, “Why has not the United States government given assistance to the nation of Buganda?” I was taken back by that. I said, “I think we have given assistance to Uganda,” not being aware at that early moment of what exact point he was driving at. He said, “Yes, but why not Buganda? We have our own government.” Fortunately, Abu Mayanja who was a Bugandan I had met in Washington before I came out to Uganda, came to my rescue. He was one of the more enlightened Bugandans. He said, “Well, Mr. Sempa, this is not a proper question to ask the American Consul General. I am sure that he does not want to hurt your feelings, but it is not necessarily appropriate for the American government to be giving assistance to a Ugandan province.” Sempa was a little miffed by that, of course, as he was trying to trip me up. At that point I caught on to what was happening and found the right words to say that we would of course look into the matter but generally speaking our assistance is given to the national government in place. Apparently my explanation appeased him, as he did not pursue the matter.

The only reason I mention this is to emphasize that one had to be careful all the time, especially when dealing with ardent Bugandan nationalists. One had to show awareness of their differences from other Ugandans, their place in the sun, of their claim to existence as a separate entity. And, of course, in the early days, soon after I arrived, Buganda was

beginning to agitate more and more for so-called independence. As I indicated before, Buganda actually did declare its independence in December 1960, soon after we had arrived. The British were very concerned about this development because it had nothing to do with the preparations that they were already beginning to make to give Uganda as a whole its independence. But Buganda claimed it had a special treaty relationship with the British and under that treaty they wanted to be independent from the rest of Uganda. They claimed a right to get their own independence. If the British wouldn't give it to them, they would declare themselves independent anyway and indeed they did. But afterwards the British simply paid no attention. The government of Uganda at that time was in British hands and they simply smiled and went on doing exactly what they had been doing, as if the Buganda declaration of independence had never taken place.

And, indeed, the Buganda, themselves, didn't make very much of it except for a bit of drumming the day after independence was declared. But when the time came for them to get their annual stipend from the British government they conveniently forgot they were independent and accepted the cash with the greatest of pleasure.

While still on Buganda, I might explain that Buganda had its own parliament, its own cabinet, its own governmental structure which was roughly comparable to the state governmental structures in the United States. And it carried out local government activities with the approval of their British protectors.

Q: Unlike any other tribal area?

VAN OSS: Some of the other tribal areas had similar structures but of a lower order. What they had in effect were simply courts and social structures, monarchies without any real power. The Omukama of Toro, for example, had his palace, which was just a big house. You called him “Your Highness” when you went to see him. Some of his servants came in on their knees but not to the extent they did in Buganda. Banyoro was probably closest to Buganda in structural terms. The Banyoro, of course, laid claim to part of Buganda, the so-

called lost provinces of Bunyoro, which were taken over by the Buganda in the course of their age old struggles with Banyoro.

So a distinction between Buganda and the rest of Uganda was always there and it was a kind of side show to the main developments that were taking place politically throughout the country.

Now, the main political scene. Before I went out to Uganda I heard people like Abu Mayanja, George Kigezi and others, talking about their struggles for independence. They did their best to struggle for independence, but, of course, the British at that point had decided they were going to give Uganda its independence so there wasn't much actual struggling going on when I got there. There wasn't even much posturing. The battle had been won. They knew they were going to get their independence so this was the administrative preparation stage.

What happened was that the British arranged for elections to be held. These elections were for an interim government which would take control under British tutelage. Some of the British institutions would remain in place. Then the interim government would prepare for the real thing which the British had decided would be on October 9, 1962. This was decided after various conferences with Ugandans and British participating.

Now this is where Buganda independence comes in. When the elections for the interim government were being arranged, most of the Buganda boycotted the elections. The only people in Buganda district who did not join the boycott and who voted were members of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party, predominantly Catholic, was headed by a lawyer named Benedicto Kiwanuka. I believe he was the brother, certainly a relative, of Joseph “Jolly Joe” Kiwanuka, who was one of the original nationalists in Uganda, one of those who really did fight for independence, who was put in jail and for a while accepted by the unknowing Western world as the leader of Uganda's independence movement. In

actuality he never did have much of a following and was not an important factor during my time in Uganda.

Benedicto Kiwanuka was a Catholic and I suppose I had better interject here that one of the differences and areas of conflict within Uganda was the religious one. There was a very strong Protestant element, a very strong Catholic element and a very strong Muslim element. The Protestant element tended to be the main religious grouping in Buganda district. The Muslims were in the south and north. The Catholics were spread fairly evenly throughout the country, and there was a significant number in Buganda, who did not really approve of the Buganda independence movement and who supported the interim elections.

The Democratic Party, therefore, won all the Buganda seats...or I think all but one. That really gave Benedicto Kiwanuka's party the victory over Obote and the United Peoples Congress, which by all rights should have won that election because they got the majority of seats in the areas outside of Buganda. But the Buganda seats gave the Democratic Party the election even though they were not the majority party in terms of overall support.

So Benedicto Kiwanuka took over as chief minister and as the first Ugandan head of an all-Ugandan government. He really couldn't govern because he didn't have enough support. He didn't have support within Buganda because his people who supported him comprised only about 10 percent of all Buganda. Eventually Obote and the Uganda Peoples Congress formed an alliance with the Kabaka's supporters who included the overwhelming majority of Baganda. These had formed a political grouping, which claimed that it was not a party exactly, but a movement called Kabaka Yekka, meaning “Kabaka Forever.” It was a party of Kabaka supporters. Obote very shrewdly...Obote had very shrewd advisers—Grace Ibingiro, for example, George Kigese, etc...they advised him to try to form an alliance with the Kabaka, which hitherto had been considered a highly unlikely event because the two didn't see eye to eye on anything. The Kabaka was very conservative, Obote considered himself a socialist.

However, Obote was a shrewd politician and knew that to win the election for the government that was going to take over after independence he needed the support of the Baganda. So he formed his alliance with Kabaka Yekka. One of the things I am happiest about in my own reporting is that I foresaw this merger at a time when the people in the Department did not expect it. I predicted it and it came about. It is not often that one's predictions come true, so one cherishes the few times that they do occur.

So the Kabaka Yekka/UPC alliance was formed and won an overwhelming majority and was in position to take charge after independence ceremony. Actually they took over before that on a preliminary basis. Obote became the first real prime minister of independent Uganda.

Q: He is the one who had J.C. Simpson as economic minister?

VAN OSS: Yes, Simpson was biracial, that is, he worked effectively with Africans and British alike.

Q: Also Patel, the Indian?

VAN OSS: Yes. I have forgotten which ministry he ran. Simpson was a very friendly, intelligent businessman who worked very closely with both the Kabaka and other people in Uganda. He was made their first Minister for Economic Affairs. He was a good, able man.

People have often asked me if I knew Idi Amin and whether he was a factor in Uganda during my assignment there and I can say that he was not. He was then a sergeant in the army. His chief fame was as former heavy weight boxing champion of Uganda. I didn't even know of him as that because he was passe by the time I arrived. There was another heavy weight champion named Okello, if I remember correctly, who was given a thorough thrashing by one of the American Golden Glove amateurs who came in to compete against Ugandan boxers. In fact the fellow who gave him a thrashing was a light

heavy weight named Martin. He wasn't even a full fledged heavy weight. He eventually became a professional boxer in the United States and did quite well.

So Idi Amin was not in evidence. There was no way of knowing that he was going to be appointed a general shortly after the British left. And there was no way for me to predict that he was going to be the vehicle through whom Obote eventually got rid of the Kabaka, forcing the Kabaka into exile. That whole episode was after my time. I suppose we should have been able to predict it because of the vast differences between Obote and the Kabaka. As I have said, the Kabaka was a very arcane, mysterious sort of person. He spoke in oracular verse almost. You had to interpret virtually everything he said and it could be done in many ways. He knew his people and he worked underground, behind the scenes. He did not go public, he was a manipulator. Obote was a political creature.

Q: What tribe did he come from?

VAN OSS: He was a Langi and came from Lira. I think he was of royal blood, but he was not accepted at Budo College (the Eton of Uganda), if I remember correctly, or perhaps he wasn't accepted at Oxford. In any event, this left a mark on him. He had a perpetual chip on his shoulder. He always seemed suspicious. As he sat in the legislative council, I would see him glaring out from under heavy eye brows as his colleagues were talking. And yet when one got to know him he had an appealing side to him. He had a warm smile and as with most politicians there was something likable about him, otherwise he probably wouldn't have made it to the top.

One little personal episode. Shortly after the final election we had a party at my house for Obote and his cabinet. One of my guests was Freddy Reinhardt who was then U.S. Ambassador in Rome. He was on a hunting trip in Africa and was ejected from his hotel because he didn't have the proper reservations. I heard about it and invited him and his wife to stay with us. So he happened to be there at the time. The whole cabinet came. When Obote entered the room he was carrying the ubiquitous cane that all African leaders

seem to carry as a token of leadership, or scepter or mace of power. He came in with his cane and my second son, who was then about six or seven at that time, spotted the cane. He loved to play the part of Zorro with canes. He seized it as Obote came in the door. Obote said, “Oh, no, no, you can't have that cane, but I will see to it that you get a better one.”

I had forgotten all about this and a few weeks later I was in Obote's office for some reason or other, and he handed me a beautiful, white and blue beaded ceremonial cane. He said that I should give that to my son in place of the one he couldn't have. Which I did. That was a very nice thing for him to have done.

Q: Does he still have it?

VAN OSS: Yes, it's upstairs.

Anyway Obote and the Kabaka were completely different personalities. The Kabaka paraded in public, of course, and was revered when he paraded. People planted palm fronds and that sort of thing and bowed down before him. But this was ceremonial. Obote was a politician. He made speeches in the legislative council. He was a power hungry, ambitious person. We should have foreseen that Kabaka and Obote could not really function together as a working team. The Kabaka would never accept Obote's prominence and Obote would always resent anything the Kabaka did behind his back. You must understand that an African leader probably is in the mode of traditional African chiefs. An African leader is in effect a tribal chief. Everything goes through him. Everything is decided by him. He wants to know everything that goes on right down to the dotting of an i and crossing of a t. I guess we should have known that Obote would never accept the behind-the-scenes maneuvering at which the Kabaka was so adept. Even if the Kabaka was doing nothing harmful, Obote would consider the mere fact that he was doing something that he (Obote) hadn't authorized in advance and hadn't been briefed on thoroughly, would be suspicious, and would assume that the Kabaka must be doing something that

would undermine his position as prime minister. And, indeed, maybe the Kabaka was undermining him.

Now continuing along these lines, we should have been able to predict that Langi and Baganda would never get along. While the British were in control such animosities were submerged in the greater aim of striving for independence and then preparing for independence and getting the government set up. But once the British had left, these animosities came to the forefront and indeed ruined the country. But this was all after I had left. We hoped that the animosities would remain submerged and indeed in the day-to-day functioning of the government, while I was there, they seemed to be in abeyance.

Q: So you had every reason to hope?

VAN OSS: Yes, all these people seemed to be friendly with each other. Even Ben Kiwanuka, the minority leader, was accepted. He would raise Cain with the opposition in the parliamentary proceedings, but then at the tea break the two sides would sip tea and joke with each other. Things seemed to be harmonious, like a little London House of Commons.

Q: But it was just a copy, it wasn't the real thing.

VAN OSS: As soon as the British left animosities must have started to build and that is for somebody else to relate because it didn't take place during my time. But it is so sad that it had to develop that way, because the way things were developing while I was there seemed almost ideal and one could see all sorts of hopeful signs.

One of the hopeful signs, for example, was the position of the Indians who were a distinct minority, but a very well-to-do minority. There were at least three special Indian groups. The first was the Indian Ishmaili, the followers of the Aga Khan. They had their own school and were prominent in Kampala. They were very well-to-do, had much of the business in that area, were socially eminent and seemed to be accepted by all. The other two groups

were the Mehta group, which owned huge sugar plantations in Uganda, and the Madvani group which was also in sugar, steel and other industries. Both Mehta and Madvani were highly educated, rich, intelligent and attractive Indians. They were well treated and an integral part of the economy. There was no reason to believe that Idi Amin, later when he was in control, would kick them all out of Uganda. I understand that now under Museveni that “Sugar” Mehta is going or has gone back to Uganda. I think Madvani has died, but I don't know for sure. But treatment of Indians is another thing that seemed to be going positively in my day, but turned out badly.

Q: Are there any other particular characters of interest you can tell us about who were there?

VAN OSS: Well it is hard to know where to begin and where to stop. One of the more interesting personages was Prince George of Toro, the Omukama of Toro. He was the equivalent of the Kabaka of Buganda, but his bailiwick was Toro, a province in the western part of Uganda—a beautiful part of the world. Now George of Toro was no Kabaka. His “palace” was a relatively small house. He had attendants and a “court” and he was respected, but he had no real power except socially. He was very amusing. He was a great drinker, loved his champaign. I remember once going to visit him and he was lying in bed with his bandaged foot stretched out on the counterpane saying, “Look at me, gout. I am immobilized by gout.” He had a great sense of humor. He had been to the States, I think on a Leader Grant. But in any event he had formed a close friendship with an American wrestler. He was very much interested in wrestling. He was a big fellow himself and probably would have been a good wrestler if he had ever tried it. His main claim to fame was that he was the father of Elizabeth of Toro, who eventually became Ugandan Ambassador to the United States and also, eventually Foreign Minister for a brief period under Idi Amin, who treated her abominably. He accused her of all sorts of terrible things, one being that she had sexual intercourse with somebody in the bathroom of an airport. It was the sort of thing that he did. She was a highly intelligent, very good looking young woman who made a name for herself in her own right. I don't know what has happened to

her since. His son, Stephen was also well-known. George, I am afraid has passed on. A very amusing, nice person and of royal blood, in African terms.

There are other interesting people, John Babiho. He was a mountain climber. He had climbed the Mountains of the Moon more frequently than any other living being. One time an American trying to climb the Mountains developed pneumonia, fell hurting his lung and had to be evacuated from the mountain. John Babiho was one of the men who helped to evacuate him. He eventually became minister of forestry or something like that in the Obote government.

Then, of course, there was Godfrey Binaisa, who was attorney general under Obote. He was a close friend of the Consulate General while we were there. A very bright person. He became president after Vincent Lule, who had taken over after Idi Amin was deposed with the help of Tanzanian soldiers. Godfrey Binaisa lasted for a very short time. Then there was an election. Obote was voted back in from his exile in Tanzania.

There was one man I want to mention whom I thought a great deal of and that was Dowdi Ocheng. He was an Acholi, the brother of Martin Aliker. Martin Aliker was a dentist who had been educated in the United States at Northwestern University and who married a black American from Louisville, Kentucky. He was a very well-known, able dentist and a very close friend to all of us. In fact, we went to him for our dental work. He was also a dabbler in real estate and made a fortune by combining his dental practice with his real estate ventures. He became a good friend of Obote and was best man at Obote's wedding. This was after I left. Eventually he went to Kenya where he practiced dentistry and made a fortune.

But his brother Dowdi Ocheng was a politician by trade. He was from Acholi and a member of the Ugandan parliament. He was one of those who really opposed the Obote coup that kicked out the Kabaka. He was an idealist and very courageous. He eventually died of cancer, but he made very forthright speeches in parliament in opposition to

what Obote was doing. If he hadn't died of cancer I am sure that he would have been slaughtered by Idi Amin because he was too outspoken and too courageous. He loved to talk about politics. I used to have great conversations with him. He was very informative.

Another one I might mention is Abu Mayanja, a small, slender fellow, who was very prominent in the independence movement before I got to Uganda. I met him in the States before leaving for Kampala. He told stories about leading demonstrations and how he was arrested at one point by the British, who ripped off his shirt and marched him half naked off to jail in front of others who had been arrested. He was upset at that. But I think he had to work hard at being a martyr. He didn't stay in jail very long. When he came out he joined the Kabaka's camp and became a member of the Kabaka's cabinet. He was a good friend and one of the few persons who later wrote me a nice letter of condolence at the assassination of Kennedy when I was stationed in Brazzaville.

Another person of interest was Michael Kintu who was Katikiro, or prime minister in the Kabaka's government. He was unimpressive looking, resembling a big, inflated frog. He didn't say much but he controlled the Kabaka's government with an iron hand. He was a very warm-hearted person underneath it all. I remember seeing him at a church gathering during the Christmas season. The children were putting on a play about Joseph and his multicolored coat...and it was very moving. Kintu was weeping while he was watching the kids act. I never knew he had that much sentiment. It was a moving performance, I remember that.

Grace Ibingiro was another one I might mention. He was of royal blood, related to the Omugabi of Ankole who was in turn related to Rwanda aristocracy. Grace Ibingiro was very young, still unmarried. He was an artist, a good painter and a very clever person. He was a close associate of Obote and he was the one who really engineered the Kabaka Yekka/UPC alliance behind the scenes.

Another man I would like to mention is Basil Bataringaya, a very honorable, honest, likeable politician. He was, I think, the minister of interior in Obote's first cabinet. Later, he was slaughtered by Idi Amin. A good friend, very fine, intelligent and well-educated.

One thing that I took away from Uganda was the realization of how charming African political leaders can be. How well educated some of them are. How bright they are. They need no help from us in political astuteness. They sometimes don't know all that much about economics, but in terms of how to gain popularity, how to gain power, how to keep power, they don't need our help. They can teach us lessons.

I was very happy to be in Uganda, in fact at my first party there...they have a habit of making you say a few words and you have to think of something decent to say. I was not prepared for this because it was my first party. I said, “I am delighted to be here. This is the one place in the world I most want to be, and I mean this sincerely.” And I did mean it. I never changed my mind. I was always happy to be there. It was a pleasant assignment from beginning to end. The only thing less than pleasant about it was that I had to leave before the independence ceremony. I was very upset and annoyed about the timing. I didn't think it was necessary to take me out.

Q: Why did they take you out?

VAN OSS: They took me out because my successor was to be the Ambassador-designate and in those days President Kennedy often changed his mind at the last minute, so if one got an ambassadorial appointment, he took it and ran to the post as quickly as possible.

Q: Was this a career person?

VAN OSS: Yes. I will never really forgive him for this because he was my Desk officer in Washington at the time.

Q: He insisted on being there.

VAN OSS: He insisted on getting out to Kampala as soon as he could. It seemed to me in retrospect that he might easily have waited a couple of weeks.

Q: So that you had been there during the preparation...?

VAN OSS: Or at least it could have been arranged so that I could have stayed to take part in the final stage of the independence process that I had followed so closely. At that time, nobody in Uganda could make any sense of my removal. They didn't realize that it was just my time to go, an ordinary change in assignments. They wondered whether my departure indicated a change in U.S. policy toward Uganda.

Q: To them it was an upset of the government.

VAN OSS: That is right, they couldn't understand it. Also, it wasn't explained to me at the time; not until my successor actually arrived did I get a full explanation. Of course, he wanted the job, got it and wanted to get out to his post before anyone changed his assignment. I just resented that I couldn't see the job finished. Anyway, that was the only negative thing.

And in general, I might make this statement: our Foreign Service is excellent in preparing people going to places, but is not very good in the way it removes people from posts. What they should realize is that when a person has been in a place for two or three years and has done a reasonably decent job and built up knowledge of the country and a lot of people know him, he should be just as careful in how he leaves as he was in preparing himself for arrival. He should make sure that everybody understands why he left and he should be able to prepare the way for his successor.

This really was not permitted me in Uganda. I don't think anybody was consciously doing me in, I just think it was a thoughtless way of changing the guard.

Q: Weren't you asked to stay on after independence before this person...?

VAN OSS: That was the whole point. I guess I should have explained it a little more thoroughly. Henry Tasca, who was then Deputy Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, came to Nairobi about six months before my departure from Kampala. I was summoned there to brief him because he couldn't come up to Uganda. After the briefing, he said that the Department wanted me to stay on in Kampala after independence to be Charg# and asked whether I would be willing to do that even if it meant postponing home leave. I said I would be delighted to do it. He said, “Well, we will expect you to stay on until about April 1963.” Later, I got a copy of the Department's notice to the British government asking for their agr#ment for me as Charg#, and I was informed of this by Wally Coutes, then Governor of Uganda. The British accepted my appointment. It wasn't that I expected to be reassigned, on the contrary I expected to be in Uganda an additional six months.

So it came as a complete surprise around August 1962 when I got a letter from Governor Williams saying that the Department was reassigning me and that I would be sent back home to be Desk officer for South African Affairs. There was no explanation other than that, no reference to my Charg#ship or the agr#ment. I couldn't understand this. I didn't know at that point whether there had been a change of policy or what. Nobody really explained it to me.

So that accounts for my pique, apart from being upset because I couldn't attend the independence ceremony and see all the people I had been working with reach the stage that they had all looked forward to with such eagerness.

And that is why I believe the Department is not always as good at ending a man's old assignment as it is in preparing him for taking on a new one.

Q: Continuing the interview of Hendrik Van Oss reporting his experiences in his assignment to Wellington, New Zealand, from July 1968 to November 1970.

VAN OSS: I was assigned to the American Embassy in Wellington, New Zealand in 1968 as Deputy Chief of Mission after having completed the Senior Seminar course at FSI. I was, therefore, refreshed and full of vim and vigor. I arrived there is July 1968. My Ambassador was John Henning, who was a Democratic Party political appointee. He had been Assistant Secretary of Labor. He had been a prominent official with the AFL-CIO. His orientation was labor union. But he was one of the best political appointee ambassadors I have ever served with and as far as New Zealand was concerned, probably one of the most effective American Ambassadors ever to have served there.

New Zealand was a wonderful country to be in. It is a beautiful country as everybody knows. For anybody who likes hiking, athletics, outdoors, beautiful scenery, a pleasant climate, it is an absolutely perfect spot. As a Foreign Service assignment, professionally, it is not all that interesting. There was no warfare, no adversaries to worry about, no political upheavals, no communist threat.

Our main concern in New Zealand was with the unfavorable balance of trade. New Zealand sold us more than we sold them. New Zealand's main exports to the U.S. were wool, dairy and meat products, and later on of course Kiwi fruit, although the last had not yet arrived on the scene...we were eating it in Wellington but they had not started exporting it in any great quantity when I was there.

Instead of security matters, the main thing to worry about was whether New Zealanders were going to export too much cheddar into the United States and thus exceed the quota limits that we had imposed upon such imports. This led to a rather interesting bit of activity. The New Zealanders would develop a new cheese that was just like cheddar, except that it had certain ingredients that were not in our quota's definition of cheddar...just enough to take it out of the cheddar nomenclature.

Q: Would they give it a new name as well?

VAN OSS: Yes, of course. They would call it something else and send it to the United States. U.S. officialdom would eventually cotton to this, would analyze the new cheese and find that it actually was just like cheddar with these very, very minor variations. We would then alter the regulations so that the new cheese would fall under the cheddar quota limitations. Whereupon New Zealand would start all over again with yet another "new" cheese with a few different elements in it that took the new product out of the cheddar designation, and the U.S. would in turn widen the definition of cheddar, and so it continued.

Also we ran into problems with beef. We had worked out a system with the New Zealanders whereby if they came within 110 percent of a certain limit to the quantity of beef exported to the U.S. this would trigger a situation in which the U.S. would automatically apply quotas on the amount of beef New Zealand would be allowed to export to us. They always kept their beef sales under that limit to avoid the imposition of quotas.

The export of young New Zealand lamb to the U.S. was not under any quota, although our own American sheep producers were anxious to limit lamb imports, so New Zealand could send us all the lamb we could take, without the risk of falling under a quota.

New Zealand, is a beautiful country. It has more sheep per capita than any other place in the world. Its human population has remained fairly steady around 3 million, and the sheep population ranges anywhere from 30 to 60 million. You are talking about 10 to 20 sheep per capita.

The climate in New Zealand is so mild, even in the winter, that grass grows all year around. They grow grass everywhere in the North Island, including the tops of high hills. So, wherever one walks one finds grass, and wherever one walks one finds sheep.

New Zealand is where I learned how to "right" a "cast" sheep, if you know what that is. A "cast" sheep is a pregnant ewe that falls, gets on its side and can't get up. If somebody

doesn't help it get up it eventually dies from starvation. The sheep are not tended daily, they are rounded up every couple of months or so. So, whenever you were walking and saw a cast sheep, the gentlemanly thing to do was to get it on its feet.

New Zealand has every conceivable type of scenic beauty. On the North Island there are verdant hills, a couple of volcanoes and thermal springs. It has windy weather...Wellington is one of the windiest places in the world. I would say an average wind during a typical day is about 40 miles per hour. The winds can get so strong that they knock you off your feet if you are on top of a hill. On the South Island there are mountains and glaciers much like Switzerland. It is closer to the Antarctic so the weather is much colder than on North Island, being very similar to that of Scotland.

It is a truism to say that New Zealand is one of the more British of the British Commonwealth areas. New Zealanders consider England their home. They are patriotic New Zealanders at the same time, but they still look to England as their mother country. The women curtsy to the Governor General's wife and all that sort of thing. And, yet, they are very democratic, admirable people in every respect. They are plain spoken, don't accept tips, or didn't while I was there, except maybe in some of the tourist hotels. They are very informal, don't like pretense, are easy to get along with, love to be talked to and to talk.

A foreign diplomat, if he allowed himself to do it, could easily be invited to speak every day of the week. Every type of club exists in New Zealand: Lions, Rotary, etc. My experience was that whenever I was asked to speak...let's say at a Lions Club...I would typically be told in advance that my speech was to be no longer than 20 minutes. After I arrived, we would have dinner and then the audience would start off and get completely involved in their own club activities...levying fines on members who had done something they shouldn't have done, cracking jokes, or making references to local business...so that by the time it was my turn to speak, the chairman would say, “Now, Mr. Van Oss is here to give us very brief remarks,” and then stage whisper to me, “No longer than seven

minutes." So I would have to compress my 20 minutes into 7. My audience always accepted whatever I said very amiably and I was always given a thank you speech in return which often tended to be longer than the abbreviated speech I had given.

As I say, New Zealand was not terribly interesting professionally. The politics were quite unremarkable, although there was a lively adversarial relationship between the National (Conservative) Party and the Labor Party.

Q: The Conservatives were in when you got there, weren't they?

VAN OSS: That is right. The Nationals were in and Keith Holyoke was the prime minister. A very fine man, very unpretentious. He had a rather pompous way of talking, but was really a very humble person. He had no servants, for example, in his house. His salary was something on the order of $17,000 a year, practically nothing as such things go. When he entertained, he did so in his own house, and his wife did the cooking. It was a very relaxed situation.

It was easier to get to know New Zealanders and get on friendly terms with them than in any other place I have served.

As I have indicated, in John Henning we had a very fine political ambassador who was a superb public speaker and a very quick learner. He was not well versed in the ways of the Foreign Service, so his DCM had to run the daily operations of the Embassy, although the Ambassador kept a sharp eye on everything and was a working ambassador, not someone who stayed out of things.

Basically, as DCM, I saw and initialed all outgoing messages except the most routine ones; administrative stuff and the like. I was busy because I knew the ropes having been in charge of various posts and having been deputy chief of mission before. Henning was a very sympathetic and pleasant ambassador to work for.

The work was not terribly difficult. The political situation was easy. Developments were not very profound or complicated and we had able officers both on the economic and political side. There were no consular problems that caused much of a stir. We had an able USIS and a CIA station, which mainly was there to exchange information with its opposites in New Zealand intelligence. So far as I was aware it did not engage in clandestine activities as such. It had a very close relationship with the New Zealanders. As you recall New Zealand was one of our allies in the Vietnamese war. They had sent a medical unit to Vietnam, so in return we gave them all of the information we had on matters pertaining to Vietnam.

Henning was extremely popular with the New Zealanders. He was a great fan of rugby, the national pastime. He went to a rugby match every weekend and afterwards would go down into the locker room and join players and fans. He didn't drink anything alcoholic, but managed to mask that successfully in the beer drinking environment of a rugby locker room. He would say a few appropriate words, and was accepted as one of the gang.
In fact, he was so much a part of New Zealand life that he was asked to give the main speech on ANZAC Day, the anniversary of the Gallipoli disaster during World War I. He gave a great speech which was broadcast throughout the country. He was an orator of the old school. He spoke without notes, memorized everything that he was going to say but gave the impression of speaking extemporaneously. He was really a highly successful ambassador in every respect.

His successor was appointed after the election of Nixon. You recall that Johnson didn't run in 1968 and Nixon and Humphrey ran a close race. Shortly after Nixon's succession to power, Henning was replaced by a young man from Kentucky named Kenneth Franzheim. A nice young man in his early 40s, if that old. He had inherited a fortune from an architect father and his grandfather who had owned a well-known Kentucky stable of race horses. He had augmented his fortune considerably by dealing in oil real estate. So he had a considerable personal wealth.

He came with a very glamorous wife who had been editor of Vogue magazine. A startlingly good looking, black haired lady who dressed in the latest fashion and created quite a stir because of the insufficiency of some of the garb that she wore on several formal occasions. It didn't cover as much as some of the more conservative New Zealand ladies thought proper.

Franzheim was on the opposite end of the spectrum from Henning as ambassador. He was a nice man and did his best, but he had had no experience in the public arena. He had never made a public speech, and was not a particularly good reader, so we couldn't expect him to read a speech effectively.

One of the things he did expertly was buy race horses. He got along well with the racing crowd. He also bought a lot of antiques, and was criticized by some for throwing his money around. I don't think this was anything he did ostentatiously, but he just was used to spending a lot of money. Since I left before he did I do not know how he was regarded ultimately by New Zealanders, but I can say with pretty complete assurance he was not as popular as his predecessor.

It was an entirely different experience working with Franzheim because it was like having to break in a new Foreign Service officer, except that he was in charge. This was not as easy as it might have been.

The things that interested me as much as New Zealand itself were some of the adjuncts to what we had to do in New Zealand proper. The Ambassador was also accredited to Western Samoa, an independent island country that had formerly been under New Zealand mandate since right after World War I. I was fortunate in making several trips to Western Samoa, which fascinated me. First of all because of its association with Robert Louis Stevenson, who lived there in Vailima, as his house was called, and who is buried on top of a hill (Mount Vaea) right behind Vailima. In fact, I visited his grave. I got to know Tanumafili Malietoa, the president of Western Samoa, who was the hereditary head of

state. The Samoans were very nice people and I was their main American contact in Wellington, so I had the pleasure of going there several times. I stayed at the famous hotel of Aggie Gray, a very colorful old lady of considerable fame who was still very much alive. She was probably in her seventies, but in her day during World War II she had run a boarding house establishment for U.S. Air Force and other officers. Some people claimed that she was the model for Bloody Mary in Michener's “Tales of South Pacific.” But I don't believe it, because Bloody Mary was a sort of half caste islander and procurer, whereas Aggie Gray was a very dignified lady, well dressed, seemingly well-educated, well-spoken certainly. To be at her hotel was the essence of South Sea Island living. Just a delight, and still is from what I hear.

We also had watching briefs on other islands, Tonga and the Cook Islands. I never got to the Cook Islands but did get to Tonga and Fiji. That was always fun.

Another thing that we did in New Zealand...Christchurch was the headquarters of the U.S. Naval force that ran our operation in the Antarctic. One of my duties was to help take care of problems that arose between our forces on the Antarctic and the New Zealand government. This was not any great diplomatic feat. It usually amounted to trying to get certain naval personnel out of jail for having done something in an inebriated moment, trying to persuade the New Zealand authorities to go easy on them without offending their sense of sovereignty. And that sort of thing.

The Antarctic itself was a highly fascinating place and I was lucky to be invited to go down for a week by the commanding officer, Admiral Kelly Welch. I stayed in his quarters along with the Admiral's brother who was visiting also at that time. We were the only two guests so I was privileged to have a real Cook's tour of the Antarctic, which is one of the most fascinating places in the world. In fact, so fascinating that I was sorely tempted to resign from the Foreign Service, join the National Science Foundation and try to get myself down there. But one of the things that kept me from doing this apart from my eternal love for the

Foreign Service, was the fact that I knew nothing about science and didn't think I could learn quickly enough to be of any great use on the ice.

Q: Later on the New Zealanders became very active in anti-Vietnam war stance, especially the young people. What was the climate like when you were there between 1968-70?

VAN OSS: Well, remember that during my entire tour the National (Conservative) government was in charge. Keith Holyoke was prime minister and he and his cohorts were very much in favor of our intervention in Vietnam and as I told you we had an extensive exchange of intelligence on Vietnam matters. However, the beginnings of anti-Vietnam sentiment were coming into evidence, particularly in the universities, among the younger people. Also, to a lesser extent, among some of the Labor Party ministers. While the National Party had the majority of the ministerial posts, there were a number of Labor Party ministers as well. One of them in particular was very vocal in his opposition to American intervention in Vietnam. So much so that when the New Zealand elections approached as I was ending my tour, it occurred to some of us that if the Labor Party won, we might have to rethink our policy of exchanging highly classified information with them because of their attitude towards our activities in Vietnam. Fortunately this question did not come up during my stay there.

However, this business recalls to mind the visit to New Zealand, after the election of President Nixon, of Vice President Agnew. I think this is worth a word or two. I was on leave in the South Island and planning a hike with my family on the Milford track, one of the most famous hikes in the world which takes several days and nights. You take a plane from Queenstown, then hike over a mountain track for several days sleeping in huts and end up at a beautiful fjord, Milford Sound. We were just about to start on the trek when I got a telegram at our motel in Queenstown saying, “Return to Embassy at once. Vice President Agnew is arriving on such and such a date.” So I had to leave my family, who carried on with the Milford track hike, and return to Wellington to prepare for Agnew.

Let me tell you, preparing for a presidential or even vice presidential visit is no bed of roses. First of all the White House sends out an advanced party of security men, who are unsmiling, down to earth, ruthless, lacking in sense of humor individuals, obsessed with the safety of their chief.

Q: And never to be pleased.

VAN OSS: Yes, never to be pleased. They make demands that no self-respecting sovereign nation will ever accept, but they make them nonetheless. Even to the point of insisting that Agnew ride in his own armored vehicle, which, of course, the New Zealanders would not have accepted had I brought the matter up with them.

Anyway, Agnew arrived and actually was quite a success. He made some very good speeches, was very calm and well-behaved. He didn't make any untold demands and the New Zealanders were quite impressed with him. In fact, they called him back to the podium again informally after he had made his prepared remarks.

He brought Bill Rogers with him, who was then Secretary of State, and at the dinner in Agnew's honor one of the New Zealanders asked Rogers whether Jack Henning couldn't remain as ambassador...whether Nixon would confirm that he would remain as ambassador. Bill Rogers said, “Well, no, we are going to appoint somebody who will be even better than Jack Henning.” That wasn't a very polite thing to say because Henning was right there during the whole business.

Apart from that, Agnew was a great success but I still will never forgive him for having disrupted my Milford track venture because I never had a chance to make the trek after that. I would still like to do it some day.

Q: Didn't the Queen come to New Zealand while you were there?

VAN OSS: Yes, she did. She made a visit with Princess Anne, but I must confess I am very hazy on this. I don't think it made too much of an impression on me then and I certainly don't remember much about it now.

One thing I would like to talk about though is the Maori. The Maori, of course, are the indigenous people of New Zealand, although they are not all that indigenous. They came there themselves only in the 11th century, if I remember correctly. A great deal of material has been written about how they arrived...in large canoes bringing with them the dogs, rats and other mammals that didn't exist on the islands before that time.

The Maori, I suppose could be likened to the American Indians. They are a small minority, probably several hundred thousand. They are a strong, warlike Polynesian group. Where they originally came from is not absolutely clear; some think from the neighborhood of Samoa, others think they may have come all the way from the Hawaiian Islands. The New Zealanders considered themselves experts at dealing with the Maori. Of course they had pitched battles as recently as the late 19th and early 20th centuries, comparable to our Indian wars. The Maori were thoroughly conquered but never completely absorbed.

They inhibit certain areas of the country...around Rotorua for instance, which is the main thermal spring area on the North Island. New Zealanders consider themselves to be very adept at racial relations. They thought, when I was there, that they had solved the racial conflict, but I can assure you that they hadn't. Their attitude was extremely patronizing...”Oh, the Maoris are good chaps, you know. They are quite intelligent.” That type of thing. But they did accept them all over the place. They weren't excluded from any activity. A number of them were in Parliament. A Maori eventually became New Zealand High Commissioner in London and a number of them were knighted. I have in my library some books by Maori authors.

I got to know one of them quite well, Kara Puketapu, who was the son of one of the Maori leaders in the Wellington area clan. He had studied in the United States at the University

of New Mexico. While there, through the Ford Foundation he had arranged an exchange of American Indians and Maori. Several years before I arrived on the scene, Maori had gone to the United States, been taken into the various Indian reservations and had seen what they were like. While I was in Wellington about a dozen American Indians came over and were taken through all the Maori areas. This was quite an eye opener for me because what few contacts I had with American Indians up to then (and I had had some contacts because during my assignment in the Senior Seminar I had done my paper on the place of the American Indian in American Foreign Relations). When I had visited American Indian reservations, the Indians had been fairly straight laced, self absorbed, solemn, fairly quiet, not outspoken in any way that I could see. But these 12 Indians from various tribes...there was a Zuni, a Mohawk, etc...entered into the spirit of things with great aplomb and enthusiasm. They turned out to be highly sociable, great wits. They danced with the Maori, embraced them, sang with them and seemed to be having a wonderful time. They had discussions with the Maori intelligentsia while they exchanged information on their experience in the United States and the Maori experience in New Zealand.

The one thing that struck me was a remark one of the Maori made after a long discussion on culture. He said something to the effect that you Indians have kept your culture in the reservations, whereas our problem is we are so much involved in the schools and life in New Zealand that we don't know when to start injecting Maori culture into our children. That seemed to mark an important difference between the two groups. The American Indians were still immersed in their own culture while the Maori were thoroughly New Zealandized, but trying at the same time to cling to their culture despite that.

The Maori add color, life and diversity to the New Zealand scene. There isn't a celebration in New Zealand that isn't marked with some sort of Maori performance...various types of dances, Hakas, singing, chanting, etc.

Q: So you left New Zealand in November 1970. Did you have an onward assignment at that time?

VAN OSS: Well, yes. I thought I was coming back to New Zealand at first.

Q: Oh, you were going on home leave?

VAN OSS: No, it was a little more complicated than that. It was to have been a four year assignment, I thought. I was getting ready for home leave after the first two years, but then my mother became extremely ill so I had to leave suddenly about a month early in November 1969. Just before I left I learned that I would not be reassigned to New Zealand, but there was no indication as to where I was going to be sent. So it was only after I got back to the Department that I learned I would be going to Mozambique, which was not an assignment that I sought, although I did indicate that I would prefer to have a post of my own, however small, rather than go out as DCM again. I always felt in the Foreign Service that it is the golden time when you have your own post because no matter how small or insignificant, it is your responsibility and you sink or swim. You have a chance to make a little mark, perhaps, that you don't otherwise make when you are just one of a larger group in an Embassy.

I must say that I was lucky in my Foreign Service career in having several posts of my own. Those are the ones that I think I enjoyed, all in all, more than the others. Although I enjoyed the others too, so I really can't say that.

Q: Today is June 16, 1992 and this is a continuing interview with Hendrik Van Oss concerning his Foreign Service career. Mr. Van Oss you served in Vienna from 1953 to 1956.

VAN OSS: I was assigned to Vienna right after Kuala Lumpur arriving there in November 1953. We stayed there until November 1956. I was assigned there as Transport and Communications Officer which was somewhat of a mystery to me because I never thought I knew anything about either transport or communications. I questioned the assignment

and was assured that the powers to be knew what they were doing. I am not sure to this day that they did, but in any event the assignment stuck.

So as an unwilling economic officer I went off to Vienna. In those days Vienna was still occupied and I won't go through all that because it is part of well-known history. But briefly, the four occupying allied powers (U.S., Great Britain, France and USSR) each had a section of Austria and each had a section of Vienna. Then there was an international section in the middle of Vienna which was governed on a monthly basis by each of the occupying powers in rotation. To get to Vienna we had to go through a corridor from the American sector, which ended around Linz, through the Soviet sector into Vienna.

I found this assignment a somewhat humbling experience because in Kuala Lumpur I had been the officer in charge and while it was a small post it was a very exciting one, and a lot was going on. I was part of and on top of anything that was happening. I was the main American representative. Whereas in Vienna I was one of about several hundred members of the U.S. High Commission. Our Ambassador, Tommy Thompson, was High Commissioner. My exact position was Alternate Representative on the Quadripartite Signals (Communications) Committee, Transport Directorate and Air Directorate. That meant in effect that I sat in on Four Power Directorate meetings in those three categories of activities.

As I say I had no previous knowledge about any of these spheres. On civil air, in the early days, I was under a chap named Tom Carter, a very experienced civil aviation attach#. I learned a lot from him. But on transport and communications, railroads, post offices, etc...I was on my own. My only consolation being that nobody else at the Embassy knew much about these subjects either. Also, I had U.S. military people who were in theory under me, but who actually ran the operations in those respective areas in the U.S. zone of occupation.

Dealing first with the one I knew the least about, the Quadripartite Signals Committee, I don't remember too much about the details. I had a local employee, an Austrian national, who knew all about the subject and helped me greatly. I remember going to see the Austrian Post Office Director and being given a book of Austrian postage stamps, which I still have to this day. The only thing worth reporting is that we had, by Quadripartite agreement, the right to inspect the telephone underground terminals which were in the Soviet zone under guard of the Soviet occupying powers. I remember going down with an American Colonel who was my deputy for this activity and an expert on communications...going down into the bowels of the earth under Vienna and seeing what seemed like mile after mile of cables and all sorts of electronic terminals and other equipment. I was trying to look knowledgeable. We “inspected” these facilities in order to retain our legal right to do so. If we had not exerted this right on occasion the Soviets might have tried to prevent us from doing it at all on the grounds that we hadn't shown any interest. So we inspected periodically.

On the Transport Directorate, the main thing we had to worry about was the Austrian railroad system. Here also I was in complete ignorance of what I was doing, except what I could pick up on the spot. Again I had military people helping me, people far more experienced in railroad management than I. But I was the representative of the Quadripartite Committee so in theory any negotiating that was done on the subject of railroads was my responsibility. We used to take inspection trips on the railroad. We would get the Austrian Director of Railroads' personal, private car and go tootling all over the railroad lines in the American occupied zone. There wasn't too much to inspect because all you see were railroad tracks and if the train slowed down for some reason or other I would try to look knowledgeable as if I knew what was happening, but I didn't.

The only other thing worth mentioning on these inspection trips was the extraordinary amount of food that we were expected to eat. I forgot to mention that the Director of Railroads, Maximilian Schantl, accompanied us—after all it was his railroad car. All the

people at the various railroad stations we stopped at regarded him as their chief and they feasted, wined and beered him and the rest of us. We might have two full dinners in the space of an hour and a half. It reached the point that the American Colonel with me protested most vociferously and not too tactfully that the food situation was becoming intolerable. I found it equally so, but managed to maintain a certain degree of diplomatic acceptance of all this stuff. I suppose we all put on about eight pounds apiece as a result of these trips.

Another thing of interest I don't remember too much about it although I did quite a bit of work on it at the time, was the Danube River. I worked with a chap by the name of Huber, if I remember correctly, who was head of the Waterways Department in the Ministry of Transport. The main thing of interest to report is that one of my colleagues at the Embassy, Paul Smith, and I took a trip from Passau, on the German border, down to Vienna in a zille, which is a cross between a canoe and a row boat. We paddled the whole distance. It took us about four days. We stayed at inns on the banks of the Danube on the way down. That gave us a good insight into the atmospherics of what was going on. I remember in one little inn at which we stopped, there were a number of working people who were eating there. We struck up a conversation with them. I was not fluent in German, but certainly had a useful knowledge of it and had no need for interpreters. We were asking these workmen about their political views and it turned out they were all National Socialists, Nazis. They said they were keeping their heads below the horizon for the moment, but expected their day to come again. There was no question about that. I must say that this was the only place that I saw neo-Nazi manifestations during my tour in Austria.

Q: When you were on this interesting four-day paddling trip on the Danube, do you remember whether there was much freight traffic?

VAN OSS: Frankly, I don't remember any. There may have been a barge or two that slipped by without our paying much attention to it. There were ferries that crossed the

river in various places. One thing worth mentioning is that there is quite a powerful current on the Danube and the little zille we were paddling was not very maneuverable so you couldn't always judge when the current might bring you in on a collision course with one of these ferries. We had to be very, very careful indeed when we happened to come close to one.

The reason there was little or no traffic, of course, was that the part of the river we were on was mostly under the control of the Soviets from Linz on. Supplies could just not go through the Soviet sector without following very carefully outlined procedures.

I might digress a little bit and say something about the occupation...about our experience during the occupation when we were there. As I say, we got to Vienna through the Soviet zone via train and had to carry “gray cards” which were identification documents. Soviet officials would board the trains from time to time and check on these cards. After arriving in Vienna we were housed in the Bristol Hotel right across the street from the State Opera House and one of the finest hotels in Vienna. We had a small son at that point so the three of us had one large double room and one adjoining single room with two massive bathrooms each with a seven foot bathtub. We had a refrigerator. Our rooms had velvet brocaded wall paper and full room service. For these magnificent accommodations we paid the princely sum of 50 cents per room per day. The Bristol was an American occupying army billet, I suppose. We were there for at least six months.

After that we moved to a small house out near Grinzing, one of the famous wine villages on the outskirts of Vienna. The house was really too small for us, but we were ready for anything after six months in a hotel. Although the hotel was wonderful in its way. We had full maid service and babysitting service. We had concierges who knew all the casts of the operas, could advise us of the best operas to see, and could procure excellent seats. In those days in Vienna you could get the best opera seat in the house for something like $2.50. If you went to the best restaurant in town you could get the finest meal you could eat for about the same price. So it was really, in a fiscal sense, paradise.

We enjoyed Vienna very much as a place to live and it was also very interesting culturally. Another thing worth mentioning is that our two youngest children, our second son and our daughter, were both born in Vienna.

There was an American Club with a swimming pool and tennis courts; there was a PX —the Army took care of its own very well. The High Commission was really part of the military structure so we benefitted from all these perks.

The other occupying powers administered their section in typical fashion. The American section of Austria took on an air of a pseudo-United States with lots of activity, business and reconstruction. The French concentrated more on the hotels and the food and that sort of thing. The British, well, there was nothing really worth noting about their section. But the Soviet section...you could go into the Soviet section with a blindfold, and when you took it off you would know at once that you were in the Soviet section, because it was drab, gray, buildings had not been repaired, the atmosphere was repressive. Perhaps it was that way because we expected it to be that way, but I think we were perceptive enough to see what was actually happening.

Another thing about the occupation, the three Western powers, France, Britain and the United States, were trying to build Austria up and bring it back to economic and political viability. We were always trying to persuade the Soviets to negotiate an end to the treaty and loosen up their regulations. This really was the bulk of my work. Eighty percent of my work was with civil aviation. Most of the work was trying to train Austrians to take over their civil air activities after the end of the occupation. The Soviets opposed this all the way because they feared that the Austrian air force would be built up and would lead to the restoration of the Austro-German Luftwaffe. This was the excuse they used to keep a tight clamp on all civil air activities by Austrians.

There were several airfields in the American zone, both civil and military, which in theory were under my aegis. One of them was in Linz, another in Salzburg, another in Tulln,

right outside Vienna. Then there was a little air strip in the American zone of Vienna itself which was right along the Danube Canal. This was really a little death trap. It was a very short and narrow runway right next to the Canal with a dog leg in it, following a bend in the Canal. Only small planes could use it, and these had to bend their flight pattern while taking off or landing. Various city streets led broadside into the landing strip. Wind would whistle through those streets and cause turbulence on the strip. There were a number of crashes; several young Air Force officers who worked with me, met their deaths there during my time in Vienna.

My activities outside of negotiations on the civil air directorate, were largely associated with trying to keep the Austrians flying. The way we got around Soviet objections was that we set up gliding schools and clubs. If you have a glider you need a small plane to get it in the air. So we had a number of small planes. It followed obviously that if Austrians were allowed to glide, they should be able to fly planes to tow the gliders up. So in this way we trained a steady stream of pilots who we envisaged would become the nucleus for the eventual Austrian airline after the occupation.

The Soviets knew pretty well what we were doing and they didn't like it but they really didn't have any legal basis for objecting to it. They interposed all sorts of obstacles. For example, they would announce arbitrarily that the air corridors were closed for a certain time. I might interject here that there were air corridors we had to follow when flying in and out of Vienna. One came up from the south which went through the British occupied zone and one that came in from the West went through the U.S. zone and, after Linz, went over Soviet occupied territory. These were very jealously guarded by us. The Soviets were always trying to get us to change these air corridors because at least one of them flew over Soviet military air installations. They assumed that we were taking photographs of these installations whenever we sent planes through the corridor, and I imagine we indeed were. But that was not my function.

Another thing we had to do was develop air traffic control personnel. For each airfield we had to have a control tower and it made sense to have Austrians in those towers. So this was how we trained Austria's air control tower operators. We also had an air rescue group which gave us another excuse for training and keeping Austrians in the air.

One interesting political matter I should mention is that the Minister of Transport and Nationalized Industries was a chap named Waldbruner, a socialist and Labor Party member. The Civil Aviation branch was under him. The head of that and my main Austrian government contact was Walter Watzek, a very nice, forthright person who had been wounded in the war and had lost his larynx. He breathed through a tube coming out of his throat and spoke with a very husky voice. But he was a fine fellow. He worked under Waldbruner.

Other people interested in civil aviation were with the other party, the National Volkspartei, Chancellor Rabb's party. Vice Chancellor Sharf was leader of the Labor Party. The National Party people who were involved with aviation were led by Fritz Polcar, a member of the Austrian legislature and a very slippery character indeed. The governmental backing for him came from the Minister of Finance who was under the control of the National Party. This was very significant because while my official dealings were with Watzek, I still had to contend with Fritz Polcar and his followers.

Fritz Polcar was president of the Austrian Aero Club which was the conservative's group that had to do with civil aviation. He was a real go getter and somewhat of a shyster, I suspect. He eventually ended up, I believe, in prison for some corrupt practice or other. But he was an interesting happy go lucky sort of fellow. He used to have a lot of parties at the local heurigen establishments. I had to go to many of those. There was a great deal of drinking on such occasions and I always tried to leave with my honor intact, which was not always very easy to do.

Polcar had a number of ex-Austrian pilots with him. One in particular I remember was Sepp Froeschl, a Luftwaffe pilot who had been shot down and severely burned. These people were all anxious to get back into the air. There was a constant struggle between the Transport Minister (Labor) and the Finance Minister (National) and Polcar to maneuver themselves into position to take over the Austrian airline and entire civil aviation activity as well, because as long as Waldbruner was Minister of Transport, the government side of civil aviation would be controlled by the people he was associated with, the socialists.

The eventual turning over of the air fields and installations to the Austrians after the State Treaty was signed, and I will go into the treaty itself later, was a very intricate business. We had to keep in mind at all times that there were two factions, each trying to get complete control over the air fields and the incipient Austrian airline. I spent almost all of my time trying to work out a process whereby we could give over these air fields to both sides so that they could all share equally in the turnover. Once the air facilities were in Austrian hands it was up to them to finally resolve their differences. I felt that we should not take it upon ourselves to hand the air fields over to one faction in exclusion of the other. And I thought that our military were lined up solidly behind this effort. I remember that we were slated to turnover all the installations on the afternoon of a certain date to representatives of both Transport and Finance Ministries. I was to pick up Watzek at an agreed upon place out at Tulln airbase. The turnover was all going to be symbolically done at the main American airbase near Vienna at a predetermined time in the afternoon. The Ministry of Finance was going to send representatives. There was to be a ceremony at which the signing over of air facilities would take place and the Austrian flag raised.

To my horror, on the morning of the day that this was supposed to take place, I got a phone call from my Air Force colleague who was in charge of operations at Tulln airbase, saying that they had “done it.” I asked, “Done what?” Well, he said, “We turned everything over to the Austrians.” I was astounded and horrified and said, “How could you have done this? We are supposed to do it this afternoon.” He said, “Oh, well, the Ministry of Finance

sent some people over this morning and we turned everything over to them." I said, "My heavens, what are you going to do about the Ministry of Transport and Watzek?" "Oh, well," he said, "we are going to have the flag raising ceremony this afternoon and he can come to that."

Well, of course, I transmitted all this to Watzek and I'm sure he thought he had been betrayed, that I had lied to him or misled him at the very least. It was a highly embarrassing situation. He came to the flag raising and they even started that ceremony off without him. It really was a terribly aggravating thing for me and for the Embassy and for half of the Austrian people we dealt with. At the time I was extremely angry with our Air Force. I felt that I had been betrayed, that they had gone against what we had all been so careful to arrange.

In retrospect I think probably that this was not just a casual mistake. I think there were a number of rather conservative colonels who were very closely involved in everything that was going on related to turning over facilities to the Austrians. It occurs to me that they were suspicious of Waldbruner and his fellow Labor Party socialists. They were just not going to turn anything over to the socialists. They felt that it was better and more American to turn things over to conservatives. I had no axe to grind for either side. All I wanted to do was to be fair to both, and I felt that our military did themselves and our Embassy a great disservice by engaging in that little bit of unfair play. I certainly reported this to the Embassy, but I doubt it ever found its way into the historical archives. But it shows how despite the best efforts of men things can go awry.

The saga of the struggle between the two parties as to which would take over the Austrian airline continued long after the occupation ended. The result was that Austria ended up with two airlines. One was Air Austria, the one run by the National VolksPartei and the other was Austrian Airways, which was under the Ministry of Transport and Labor and run by a gentleman named Rudolf Trimmel, with whom I kept a Christmas card correspondence until he died several years ago.

As a postscript to all this, years later, about eight or ten years ago, Anne and I went back to Vienna on a nostalgia trip. I went to the Austrian Airlines office there—by this time there was only one air line—and asked to see a list of the Board of Directors to see if there was anybody I remembered, but there wasn't. Then the young lady who was helping me handed me a book in English on the history of the Austrian Airlines. I speedily rushed through the pages trying to find the era of the mid-50s in which I had spent most of my time worrying and working. I think I found only one sentence that covered the whole period of occupation. Something to the effect that during the occupation Austrian air activity was confined to gliding and after the occupation the Austrian airline came into being. Almost a complete ignoring of what had really taken most of my life during three whole years. So that was another humbling experience.

The only other thing I want to talk about was the signing of the Austrian State Treaty. As civil air officer, since the problems associated with aviation were fairly important, I was appointed a member of the U.S. negotiating team. I participated in the preparations for the talks (at a very low level).

I was highly impressed with the negotiating ability of our Ambassador, Tommy Thompson, who incidentally was one of the finest ambassadors I have ever worked with if not the finest. He was one of the best negotiators our government has ever had, although he didn't do much actual bargaining. He was effective without seeming to be so. He knew when to stand firm and how not to say too much. He kept his remarks to a bare minimum.

But he was on top of everything and he knew that he had the Soviets over a barrel because the Soviets had determined to relinquish control. They had asked Chancellor Rabb to come to Moscow a month or so before the State Treaty negotiations began, and had at that time proposed certain procedures for ending the occupation. The Austrians were so anxious to see the end of the occupation that they agreed to various conditions

which Ambassador Thompson was confident they need not have accepted and he was determined that he was not going to let Austria weaken itself in this way.

For example, the Soviets wanted to keep extraterritorial rights in Austrian oil fields and oil industry after they left the country. Tommy concluded from long experience dealing with the Soviets that they were determined to get out of Austria and would eventually knuckle under and accept any reasonable precondition that we might insist on. If they wanted Austria to be neutral, as they did, they had to live by that themselves, and couldn't retain extraterritorial rights. So he very cleverly and persistently held firm on this point and finally forced the Soviets to withdraw their demand.

It went right down to the wire as a matter of fact. Secretary Dulles was on his way over to sign the Austrian State Treaty. He was in Europe somewhere (perhaps London or Frankfurt) and Tommy sent one of his officers to Dulles to tell him not to come until he gave the word. Dulles knew what was going on and said publicly he would not arrive for the signing unless this point had been settled. So it was indeed settled.

Q: Was this 1951?

VAN OSS: It was 1955. I arrived in 1953 and left in 1956. The State Treaty was signed in Vienna, I think in May 1955.

Anyway, the negotiations ended successfully, the date of the signing of the State Treaty was set and the great day arrived. We had sent over a tremendous delegation of people led by Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, and including all sorts of great names like Chip Bohlen, Livingston Merchant, etc. There were at least 50 personages, a large delegation.

I remember on the signing day we went in a motorcade consisting of 13 cars. I was in the 13th car, so I am glad there were 13. We rode from the Embassy over to Belvedere Palace where the treaty was to be signed. The streets were packed with Austrians. It was

intermittently raining and sunny...sometimes you could see a sea of umbrellas and other times you could see smiling faces. People were throwing flowers and cheering. I felt as if I were participating in the liberation of Paris or something like that. It was really one of the most heartwarming experiences of my entire time in the Foreign Service.

Anyway, we got to the Belvedere Palace. The signing was to take place in the ballroom on the second floor. The floor of the ballroom was supposed to be weak so the number of people allowed to be in the ballroom was severely limited. There was a long table for the five foreign ministers, including the Austrian Foreign Minister, Figl, and their immediate aides were behind them. The rest of us were supposed to stay in rooms off the ballroom and were allowed to look through the doors. But the minute the big five arrived and took their places at the table, as if by an unheard signal we all streamed in from the antechambers and grouped ourselves around the table. I found myself in the back row within a meter and a half of John Foster Dulles' pen. It was somewhat of a crush.

The signing took place and afterwards the foreign ministers went out on a balcony. There were great crowds in front of the Palace. Dulles, in the words of Chip Bohlen or Livingston Merchant, looked like a debutante after her ball because he was smiling and waving at the crowd. Not at all like the dour, rather crusty old fellow that we were used to. Molotov was a short, stubby character. He didn't smile at all but had his hands clasped together over his head in the classic gesture of a winning prize fighter. Macmillan was the ham actor looking over the crowd, pointing and waiving to people. So it was a great performance by everybody. That night we had a reception and dance in the ballroom at the Sch#nbrunn Palace, which was opened up to everybody for the occasion, reminiscent of the glorious days of the Austrian empire.

The final thing to say is that the next day the newspapers carried a picture of the long table with the foreign ministers and the people in back of them. This picture, as is often the case with newspaper photos was rather indistinct, but I thought as I looked at it that I saw a familiar hairline peering over the group behind the table of notables and thought it

was yours truly. So I immediately ordered a dozen copies of the paper and put in a request to the newspaper for an actual positive print of the picture saying that I would like to get something to frame for my mother and posterity. The only trouble was that when the print finally arrived, the hairline was indeed familiar, but it was not my hairline, but that of a colleague in the Austrian Foreign Office. So much for fame.

Q: You mentioned once when Tommy Thompson was concerned about what the Soviets demanded, that he knew that the Soviets wanted out. What did you mean? Were the Soviets anxious to bring this occupation to an end?

VAN OSS: You must realize that Tommy was in constant communication with his old Soviet-hand buddies, Chip Bohlen and other people. All these things were being discussed and analyzed very thoroughly. The feeling was that the Soviets were anxious to find a solution to the Berlin question, and that they thought by giving in a little bit in Austria where they were not as deeply involved, they could kill several birds with one stone. If they could bring about a neutral Austria, or an Austria that was not in the Western camp, they felt they might be able to lighten the political climate and perhaps induce the occupying powers to be willing to negotiate something of comparable significance in Berlin. Possibly a neutral Germany. It was thus felt that the Soviets thought by bending in Austria they could get something favorable to themselves out of the German situation.

Now there may have been other things involved. There may have been cost factors, who knows. I think you have to examine the records of that time to find out everything that was involved. But Tommy Thompson could analyze these things and he knew through his contacts with Austrians, what the Soviets had told them in their Moscow meeting with Rabb. So he knew the Soviets had made up their minds to end the occupation. And he knew that since they wanted to get out they probably could be persuaded to give up a number of the conditions they had forced the Austrians to accept...which the Austrians had been willing to accept because of their overwhelming anxiety to end the occupation as quickly as possible.

Throughout all the State Treaty negotiations the Austrians would become very nervous when we stood firm, when we insisted that the Soviets give up extraterritorial rights, for example. They were always afraid that the Soviets would say, “Well, if you won't give us what we want, we won't sign the treaty.” But Thompson was a shrewd judge of Soviet character. He knew he had them over a barrel and that they would eventually knuckle under, and they did.

Through this whole process he displayed nerves of steel. He was patient, persistent. He must have been a brilliant poker player. He was always in complete control of everything, had his fingers on every aspect of the negotiations. He lost about 17 pounds in the process. It was a great performance. I might add that it was his second winning performance. Prior to this he had negotiated a successful outcome to the Trieste conflict between Italy and Yugoslavia.

I don't think there is too much more to say, unless you can think of something that I should talk about. I might mention one thing of interest. While I was duty officer at the Embassy at one point some people straggled into the Embassy...this was on a weekend as I recall...a young man and his obviously pregnant wife. They declared that they had just been in an air crash. It turned out that their plane had crashed on the Kalenberg, right outside Vienna. It had flown into the side of the hill and broken apart. A number of passengers had gotten out without a scratch, including this young frightened American woman who apparently became quite a heroine in the process. She ripped off her petticoat and helped bind the wounds of one of the men who had been hurt. One of our couriers was on that plane...I think his name was John Irwin, if I am not mistaken. He was severely hurt and got some kind of high military award for valor because he carried the diplomatic pouch or part of the pouch out of the plane with him and wouldn't accept pain killers or treatment until he had delivered the pouch into the hands of somebody qualified to receive it. It was quite a performance on his part.

Q: You have been telling me about the collegial atmosphere at the Embassy in Vienna. I wonder if you would like to put that on the record as well?

VAN OSS: Yes, I would like to. Posts are different. Vienna, I think, was one of the friendliest posts I have ever been assigned to. A very close spirit of cooperation and friendship developed among all the people who were in my type of work. In other words the officers at the Embassy and their wives. We were all doing work that we thought was important and interesting and, for some reason or other that can't be quantified or described, very warm friendships were made at this post.

I think we now have more close friends from our Vienna days than from any other post where we have served. I think other people who were assigned to Vienna at that time would corroborate this. It was most unusual. When Dick Davies, who was the head of the political section, left, he said in his final remarks at his farewell party, “You may not realize it, but this is a special post. The friendships that you have made here will last all of your lives.” He went on in that vein for a few minutes and finally broke down in tears and had to stop. So it was an unusual post.

Q: Do you think the political situation had a lot to do with that?

VAN OSS: Yes, I think we were all working hard. We were up against formidable adversaries. We had fine people in charge...the Ambassador, his deputies and senior and junior officers were all able. It was just an unusual amalgam of things that made for a very interesting and friendly post. The gemutlich atmosphere of Vienna, the music, food, and historic buildings, the charm of the countryside, all contributed to the feeling of well being each of us had.

Q: This concludes Mr. Van Oss' remarks about his posting to Vienna from 1953-1956.

Van Oss - Part 2

Interview of Henrik Van Oss, Foreign Service officer retired. This is being taped on November 14th, 1991, and Mr. Van Oss is talking about his experiences while serving in the Department of State.

VAN OSS: One of the interesting things about the Biographic Information Division occurred at the time that the State Department Division, and the Biographic Record Section at the OSS were merged.

Q: Wasn't that over where they had the map section also in the old auditorium?

VAN OSS: Not quite, no. It was a building on C Street, an old building and it was right across the street from the old Naval Medical buildings which housed a lot of the OSS stuff. The combined biographic section, which I headed as acting chief, was under what became known as the State Department Research and Intelligence section. And that was at that time almost entirely, or at least a good proportion of it, was the OSS Research and Intelligence section, I think that is what it was called. And it was headed by the very well known historian, William Langer and one of his main assistants was Sherman Kent who was a very well known OSS operator, or employee, or officer. These were all on the research and analysis side of it. These were not men who were involved in espionage or counter-espionage and that sort of thing.

It was very interesting because I sat in on all the staff meetings that Langer held to discuss the process of merging the OSS Research and Intelligence section into the Department of State. And all these high ranking, well trained experts like Burton Fras__ in the Far East, and various others I could mention, who faced this prospect of now becoming State Department members were very, very nervous about it. They were very reluctant to go over to go under the State umbrella. They said that they thought they should be part of the policy making process, and that if they weren't they would resign. They were very nervous and upset about the demise of OSS, and they're going under State. But this was edicted, and a man named McCormick who was the head of the whole State Department

intelligence set-up, under whom Langer was one of the main deputies. McCormick's place was taken by Bill Eddy, Colonel Eddy, who was a very well known military intelligence, and OSS man in the Middle East.

Anyway, the political desks in the Department were too clever by far for the much more highly trained, and well educated opposites in OSS, and they refused to give up any of the policy making powers that they had. So the remnants of OSS had to be content with providing the intelligence on which the policy would be based, which was a very responsible thing for them in any event, and it was certainly nothing for them to be upset about. They hadn't had policy making powers in OSS so why should they feel they should be brought into that process more than as the providers of the information on which the policies would be based. Of course, we had in Biographic Intelligence no such pretensions, or hopes. We knew that we were basically a filing organization, a collection organization, and we proceeded on that basis.

My deputy there, I might mention, was Doug Heck who later became ambassador in Niger, Africa, and then in Nepal, and had a distinguished career in the Foreign Service.

Q: I'm talking about Washington in the '42 to '48 period. Were you still living at 1527 I Street at this point? How long did you stay there?

VAN OSS: Yes, I stayed there for about two or three years. I was the last one there, and that in itself is a long story that belongs in another medium, I think.

Getting back to the Department, and wartime Washington. I can't tell you how accelerating it was to be in Washington at that time. I knew from the first day that I reported that this was where I wanted to be, and where I belonged so to speak. It was, as I say, essentially a sleepy town but the people who were working in it, and the people who were coming into it from the outside, were completely and profoundly involved in the war effort in one way or another. We were convinced in putting out the proclaimed list of bloc nationals, we were doing our bit to make sure that Germany and Japan were not benefitting from trade

with firms that were subject to our control. By that I mean these firms, once they were on the list, if any American firm traded or had dealings with a firm on the proclaimed list, that American firm was in danger of being placed on that list itself. Or having some penalties imposed on it. We worked long hours, we were enthusiastic. Everybody was upbeat. We were all staunch supporters of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and we couldn't imagine what would go on without him. I remember when he died in 1945 that we all wondered how in the world Harry Truman could cope. I remember one colleague saying, “Well, if Harry Truman has any courage or intelligence at all he'll just say, 'I can't do it,' and resign and let somebody take over who can.” Well, obviously that was not a very accurate assessment of Harry Truman's worth.

The weaknesses in the Department, which I will describe later, did not exist to the same extent at this period. There were clearances that one had to get, of course, and inevitable conferences—interminable conferences of one sort or another. But there was one troubling schism, if you want to call it that, or dichotomy, which is the best word, and that was between the professional side of the State Department, and the administrative side of the State Department, and I had a slight taste of the administrative side because I was asked to become the administrative officer of World Trade Intelligence for about a six month period. It didn't take me more than about one month to realize that I was in something that I didn't want to be in. Because in administration one was immediately put into contact with all sorts of personnel problems of one sort or another. One that I can remember was a secretary who was working in the Secretary of State's office was kidnaped by her boyfriend, and taken off someplace, and eventually found and brought back. The poor thing was fine, nothing which we would call mementos today happened to her. But in those days it was a great scandal, and she was taken out of the Secretary's office, and brought into our office and she became my secretary.

Q: More or less in disgrace you mean?

VAN OSS: Yes, and I was asked whether I minded. I was delighted, she was awfully good. But apart from that there were other former employees who had grievances, they felt that they hadn't been promoted, or that their efficiency rating reports hadn't been what they should have been. And then we had to go to hearings on this sort of thing. And then there were interminable job descriptions, reports that you had to make. And worst of all, you dealt with long-standing low-ranking civil servants who didn't have this gung-ho approach. They couldn't have cared less whether there was a war on or not. They obeyed the rules, and they filled out...

Q: Like dealing with the post office.

VAN OSS: Yes, sort of, relatively speaking. Mind you, they had some good people too. Bob Ryan, who later became ambassador to Niger, was a very good administrative officer, and personnel officer, but he was the exception rather than the rule. Not only that, I still had my P-1, or P-2 by this time rating, and I was anxious to get back into professional status. And as a GS the rate of promotion was very much slower, and it depended on criteria that had nothing to do with what little skills I had at that time. My educational background was in political science, and my interests were in that, and not in management and economics—or rather, administration. So, fortunately, I was able to get back into the professional work, and if I remember correctly and I may be wrong on this, I think it was the setting up of the Biographic Information Section of World Trade Intelligence that gave me the means of doing that.

The professional side of the Department was fun, it had to do with foreign policy, and world events. And the administrative side was civil service, job descriptions, dullsville, if I may say so. To me anyway.

Q: As I recall, there were these different grades. There was the P-grade for professionals, and a GS grade for everybody else. And in the Foreign Service itself, which you weren't

yet in actually, administrative personnel did not have officer rank. Isn't that true at that time?

VAN OSS: That's right. They were called FSSs, Foreign Service Staff personnel. And the officers were called FSOs, Foreign Service Officers. Again, some of my colleagues have done very well in administration. One in particular was Findley Burns, who really made his mark in administration and eventually became ambassador to Ecuador, and Jordan. And he was administrative counselor in London, I think with ministerial rank. So he did awfully good, but he was good, and imaginative, and he operated on a high scale. He was not to be compared with these relative drudges who had spent their lifetime... these elderly men and ladies who had been doing the same thing for years and years and years. So that was the one weakness, if you want to call it that, of the Department at the time. Outside of that that whole period was a fascinating one, and I don't regret any of it. Even the slight exposure to administrative work. That was an eye opener for me.

Q: So, as you said, you took the exam in '45, you were sworn in in '46, but you actually didn't take an FSO job for two years after that.

VAN OSS: For two years. I was finally appointed in roughly May '48 to Shanghai. In the meantime, the preceding November, 1947, I had been married to my present spouse, and we went to Shanghai, our first post together. And I think that's one of the luckiest things that ever happened to me for many reasons, particularly seeing how difficult it is for a young bachelor to find a suitable person to marry when he is abroad.

Q: Today it's more difficult.

VAN OSS: Even more difficult today, my goodness. It was difficult then. In those days there were one or two female Foreign Service officers. Frances Willis, I think, was the one I remember most. She was a high ranking FSO, and there were one or two others. I think there was one named Hughes. But really the first one of my generation was Ann Littleton, who passed the exams about the same time that I did, and was assigned to Canada. And,

as I understand it, was taken over by the ambassador's wife and sort of treated like a debutante daughter, and really resented greatly not being allowed to do her work like any other officer—being treated with kid gloves. She eventually, I believe, resigned. And, of course, today that's completely changed.

In 1948, I and my new bride, Anne Burnett of Louisville, Kentucky, went to our first post in Shanghai. And then in 1950 I described that on a previous tape—in 1950 we went to Kuala Lumpur which I have also described. And in 1953 we went to Vienna, which I will describe later, except to say that in Vienna I was doing, among other things, civil aviation work. And that, for better or worse, brought me to the attention of the Civil Aviation Division of the Department, and I was assigned to the Department from Vienna to the Aviation Division in the Office of Transport and Communications.

Q: What year?

VAN OSS: In 1957. This is the second stage that I mentioned in the beginning of this tape. I served with this division for two years, '57 to '59, two and a half years, and then went from there I volunteered for special African area studies, and went into SAIS, School of Advanced International Studies, at Johns Hopkins for training in African area studies.

My time in the Department with Civil Aviation was an eye opener to me. I went there under some protest—not under protest, but somewhat reluctantly because I had hoped to get back into political work. I had been doing economic work in Vienna although there was a very strong political cast to what I was doing as will be revealed later. But I had hoped to get into either another post abroad, or into political work in the Department. I hoped really to get abroad because I had three youngsters, the oldest one four, and the youngest two still in diapers. So for Anne's sake I wanted to have the benefit of the easier living abroad where you could get help, and that sort of thing.

But it was not to be, and I found myself in the Aviation Division. Now, at this point I was in a division that worked very closely with airlines, very closely with the Civil Aeronautic

Board, very closely with the civil air administration, CAA which later became the FAA, very closely with IATA, I think that's International Air Transport Association. In other words, we were exposed to lobbyist and pressures from the American private sector which I had never been really exposed to before.

My job at Civil Aviation Division was ostensibly that of head of Air Transport Relations branch of the Aviation division. And my job ostensibly was to help negotiate bilateral air transport agreements with other countries. And I had four or five officers under me, so to speak. And I had taken the place of a woman named Bert Koquaiser who was a formidable, very highly-trained civil aviation expert who had been doing this work for heaven knows how long, 20 years possibly, or 15 years anyway, and who had a steel trap mind. She was a lawyer trained in air law, international relations, etc., and veteran negotiator, with her own ideas of how to do things. She was still in the division as a deputy chief, I think. So here I was, knowing practically nothing about this side of civil aviation.

I found my underlings, so-called, were far more qualified to deal with these matters than I. Jim Ferretti and John—oh, I can't remember some of the other names—but Jim Ferretti in particular was a brilliant civil aviation specialist who knew far more than I would ever know about this subject. I felt to be able to handle this subject properly I should take a year off to study, and perhaps get a degree, and really know what I was talking about. But, nonetheless, clinched my fist and plunged into it. And what an eye opener it was. I've said that before, but if you can imagine going into a bilateral negotiation with, let's say, Holland, and Holland is trying to...well, let me go back. I have to go back a little bit.

The essence of our problem was Pan American Airways. Pan American had been practically the only airline that we had after the war. The only airline flying international routes. So we had been able to get very advantageous bilateral air agreements with practically every country that mattered. And Pan American was determined to hang on to these advantages come hell or high water, and stopped at nothing really to prevent the

Department, and the CAB, and anybody else from frittering away these rights that they had.

And then the other interesting thing is, that the CAB, as I recall, a five-headed monster. There were five civil aeronautics board members, each one equally as important as the other. So that by getting the approval on one, you could not depend on getting the approval of the other four. I think there were five, maybe there were only three as I think on it. But anyway, let's say five, history will forgive me if it was three.

So you go into a bilateral negotiation with let's say Holland. Holland wants to fly into, let's say, Houston. And what we want in return is beyond rights in Amsterdam so that PanAm can fly into Amsterdam, and carry passengers to any other country in the world beyond Amsterdam. Well, of course, Holland doesn't want to give up those rights because KLM flies those rights, and they don't want competition.

Q: KLM was then a fairly new organization compared to PanAm.

VAN OSS: Well, I don't know how new it was, but it certainly was not up to PanAm after the war because Holland was devastated by the war, and it took them a number of years to get on their feet. But PanAm really was the pioneer in a lot of this, or almost a pioneer, and it was sitting in the cat bird seat. It had very powerful lobbyist in Washington, and they didn't hesitate to chop off the heads of any State Department people who opposed them. They had them transferred, or fired, or whatever was necessary to get their way.

So, getting back to Holland, here you have the Dutch mission negotiating team headed by their Minister of Transport.

Q: Because KLM was a government agency?

VAN OSS: Oh, no, no. KLM had a representative there to...

Q: I mean it was owned by the Dutch government, it wasn't a private airline.

VAN OSS: I'm not sure about that. I think it could well have been at least partly private. Anyway, this is unimportant, at least not to the point that I'm trying to make.

So, you sit there. You come in, you've had meetings with the CAB, with PanAm, with IATA, with every conceivable person in the United States interested in this. And you try to reach a U.S. position that you can support in this negotiation with Holland. And you come into this first meeting, and you haven't reached a position. So with the whole Dutch group sitting opposite the table from you, you say...I don't say, I was one of the aiders and abetters, but we had a Deputy Assistant Secretary Kalijarvi, or somebody like that...not Kalahari, well, I don't remember his name, it was a Finnish name. He was the chief negotiator. You have him saying, “Gentlemen, welcome to Washington. We hope to be able to start this negotiation fairly soon, but unfortunately we have to postpone it for a little bit.” So then we smile, and shake hands, and leave. Then we stay up all night debating with PanAm, and CAB, trying to reach some sort of an agreement because we in the State Department, want to help Holland, and we want to be able to bargain, and say, “All right, we'll give you Houston if you'll give us beyond rights to country X and Y.” But PanAm doesn't want to give up Houston. They don't want KLM coming into Houston, so they won't agree. And if they don't agree, the CAB won't agree because they're worried about the pressures that PanAm will put on them through Congress. And Congressmen are calling.

So we go into the next session the next day, and we say, “Welcome again. Have a cup of coffee. Unfortunately we haven't yet...there are certain things that we have to talk over.” Well, this happened, as I recall, for four or five days. So we finally hammered out something that we would give them Houston in return for this and that and the other thing. And finally had the negotiation, a day or two of it, and came to a rather satisfactory compromise. And that was it. But the embarrassment of going in day after day, having

invited them over at a certain time on the assumption that we were all ready to roll, and then not be able to even bargain, even put forth a position, is really excruciating.

Q: Was there someone from L on that negotiating team as well?

VAN OSS: I don't recall that he was actually on the negotiating team. I think that the Bureau of Transport and Communications had an L person assigned to it who may have been involved. I don't remember who was on that particular negotiation. But there were some very good men on it. I think at least one or two members of the CAB were on the negotiating team, Kalijarvi, I guess was the name of the Deputy Assistant Secretary who was the head of it. And Joe Watson was the perpetual very, very well informed staff assistant to the CAB, who really did all their work for them. Anyway, that's not important.

The important thing is that you realize that negotiation isn't always a matter of compromise, or even of argumentation, nor of putting forth a position. It's a matter of trying to hammer out something that's acceptable to everybody in your own country that enables you to start talking with a foreign country. And this procedure was duplicated on several other negotiations that I was involved in. So that was an eye opener to me. I certainly went into the Foreign Service with the knowledge that I would have to support my government against foreign interests, and I was perfectly willing to do that, but I had never realized that I would have to fight against my own country in a sense. Fight against businessmen, and lobbyist, and Congressmen, and that sort of thing—not fight against them, but at least find them opposing everything, struggle with them. Find them opposing everything we were trying to do. And, of course, I can see their point, their interest. PanAm's interest was heavily involved.

Q: But PanAm didn't see the world picture.

VAN OSS: Well, PanAm didn't care about the world picture. PanAm cared about retaining its privileges and its routes, and not getting too much competition, and getting its profits,

and so on. And that's the function of a company. I'm not blackening their name. I think any company does that that has an interest...

Q: It has served it right, hasn't it?

VAN OSS: Yes, look at PanAm today as the result of competition.

One interesting thing that happened to me in the Aviation Division occurred, I think, in 1958. By way of preliminary, before I go into it.

I found after a bit that, I hate to admit it because I was over my head as the so-called the chief of Air Transport Relations, over my head in the sense that I didn't feel that I should be supervising people who knew more than I did. So I suggested to Henry Snowden, who was the chief of the Aviation Division, that we divide the work up differently. That instead of acting as a pyramid with these four men reporting through me, that we give each person an area to cover, and that he be in charge of that area, and go right up to the chief of the division, Henry Snowden, without this extra layer that I imposed. Because I couldn't really improve too much on what he had come up with. Maybe I could improve their grammar, or their writing style, or something like that. But certainly the substance they were more than able than I to determine what it should be. So we did that, and I took for my section the relations with the Soviet Union.

And as part of that I had a great amount of fun because, I think it was in '58, that Khrushchev made a trip to the United States. Now, don't hold me on the time, but it was I think '58, and there were two trips to the United States. One by the Russian Ambassador Smynoff and the other by Khrushchev. But the Khrushchev one is the most important one because this involved what in essence became a negotiation with the Soviets. And I was working closely with Paul Smith, and Ed Fiers, and a fellow named Isham on the Soviet desk. But I was also working with the FBI, and with the immigration officials, and customs, and everybody else involved because Khrushchev wanted to fly over on his plane. And in those days the Soviets were way ahead of us in jet passenger aircraft. They

had great big planes. I can't remember the name, Tuperoff, I think it was, I can't remember the designation. But they were huge planes, four-engine jet jobs, and they wanted to bring this plane into Idlewild which they thought was the most prestigious American airfield. This was in the days before such planes could get into National Air Field in Washington.

So, the problem was that the New York Port Authorities, or the people who ran Idlewild, were bound by noise regulations which the people living around Idlewild had forced the legislators to impose upon them. And the Soviets could never really get it into heads that we in the State Department couldn't simply order Idlewild to ignore these noise regulations. And I can remember interminable debates with the Soviet people. I remember a Lt. Colonel Layzoff, and as I recall another young officer named Eganoff, and one or two others who would come over and I just couldn't convince them that the State Department, and the President, nobody had the authority to order the New York Authority to order Idlewild to ignore these noise regulations.

Finally I found out that the only jet craft that had passed the noise regulations was the French caravel. They had voluntarily submitted to a test, a very thorough noise testing, and a report had been prepared on this noise testing. And I knew that this report was unclassified, so I exercised what little cunning I had, and I got a copy of this report and I invited the two Soviet negotiators to come to my office, and I invited somebody from the Soviet desk to come. I again said that we couldn't possibly...there was no way under the law that we could force Idlewild to do anything it didn't want to do. Mind you, I suppose if we had really made a strong pitch to Idlewild, we might have been able to persuade them to allow this plane in. But we didn't feel that was the thing to do. We wanted the plane to come into Andrews Air Force base for many reasons, including where they would be over flying, and that sort of thing.

So I said to these Russians, “If you would agree to submit to a noise test, like the one that the Caravel took, if you passed that test, then I'm sure that Idlewild would let you in.” And, of course, they said they wouldn't dream of doing that. And I could see that they didn't

believe me when I talked about the Caravel, so I finally took out from under my blotter on the desk, I took this report out and I said, “Here's the report that proves that Caravel passed this noise test.” And the Soviets looked at that with mouth watering, and I said, “Would you like to have it?” And the Soviet desk officer almost fell through the floor at that because he was so used to hanging onto everything. I said, “Here,” and I gave it to them. And the Soviet clutched it eagerly, and put it in his coat pocket. And that did the trick. They accepted finally that they would have to go through a rather cumbersome process if they were to get into Idlewild. And eventually the plane came into Andrews Air Force base. And I had to assure my Soviet desk colleague that this was unclassified, and was not in violation of the U.S. security regulations.

But the amount of work involved in just getting this one plane in was monumental. We had to go through many meetings with FBI, and control tower personnel, and figure out where American officers could board the plane, in Gander I think it was, and it really was quite an interesting operation. A lot of work for something that wasn't really all that significant, but I found that one of the more interesting things that happened to me in Civil Aviation.

Q: How long were you actually in the aviation division in the State Department assignment?

VAN OSS: It was about two years. And it was one of the periods when promotions were coming slowly, and I was still a Class 4 officer. And I thought I would make a virtue out of necessity, or a virtue out of...I can't think of the word. Anyway, a virtue out of necessity, by volunteering for the African Area Studies. And I was accepted.

Q: You interested in that.

VAN OSS: Well, I was. I was interested in other things too but Africa was beginning to open up, and I thought this was a particularly interesting time to become involved in an area that was emerging to independence. So I was accepted, and I was sent for a full school year training at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins

in Washington. And that's where I spent another year, and then following that was sent to Uganda which I think I've already described. And following that Brazzaville. And after Brazzaville I was assigned to the Department for the third period.

Q: This was in 1964.

VAN OSS: This was in 1964, and this period went from '64 to '67 when I was selected to attend the Senior Seminar in foreign policy which was the most senior training that a State Department official could do in the Foreign Service Institute. That was a great experience.

But in the Department I was assigned to the job of Deputy Director of the West African Affairs in the African Bureau, which was then headed up by Soapy Mennen Williams, and my boss as chief of AF/W was Bill Trimble who had been ambassador in Cambodia, a very senior Foreign Service officer, an old Princeton man. And Bill was the first substitute Deputy Assistant Secretary. In other words, whenever one of the regular deputy assistant secretaries was out of town, Bill would be seconded to the assistant secretary's office to carry out those functions. And when he did that I became Acting Director of West African Affairs.

And in those days we had some 18 West African countries, all of them, there's no need to innumerate them, but all of them south of Mauritania, and the sub-Saharan portion of Africa. They included, as I recall, down to the Republic of Congo, and Zaire, which was then still called the Congo.

That was a most interesting period, and a very, very busy period because, as you know, these countries were emerging into independence very rapidly from Ghana in '57 on. All of them were independent by the time my assignment was over. And not only was that an interesting period, but the first years of independence were very interesting and there were numerous coup d'etat in our areas. And I can remember numerous occasions being...by numerous I suppose I mean at least a half dozen, or up to ten, being awakened at the wee hours of the morning and told to get myself over to the Department into the operations

room, and attend to Nigerian coup, or Guinean coup, or something of that sort. Or some crisis or other. So it was an extremely vivid, and interesting period.

But working in the Department had its drawbacks, as I've mentioned before. There were innumerable clearances that one had to go through. One had to work very closely with the AID division, the African portion of the AID agency—the Agency for International Development. And it was a constant fight with that agency to get help. To get money for the African countries. We not only had to get the money voted by Congress, but once it was voted we had to get AID approval for everything that we tried to do. I guess AID would have put it the other way around, that they had to get our approval for everything they tried to do. But we were usually the ones poking and prodding, and trying to get AID to send assistance. And AID was usually the one that was dragging its feet. And for good reason because AID was under close scrutiny by Congress, and Congress imposed all sorts of restrictions, and regulations, and limitations, which AID had to follow.

So if you had an AID project, it would take a long period for that project to become a fact. For example: we had a project, a bridge across the Niger River in Niger, which would connect, if I recall, Niger with Nigeria, if I remember correctly. This bridge was the largest project for Niger, and it required a feasibility study by AID and that took at least a year. Then they found that the original feasibility study was no longer applicable because the action of the flowing beneath the Niger River had undermined the foundations of where the bridge was supposed to be. So the whole thing had to be revised, and so this project never did get...

—end Tape 1, Side A.—Start Tape 1, Side B.

...and this is typical of all large projects. They all required feasibility studies, they all required large numbers of personnel, AID personnel being sent over to administer whatever the project was. It all took a great amount of time, and in my opinion, a great deal

too much of the money allocated by Congress was spent in just the administration of the project, rather than in the substance of the project.

We found that the most valuable, and useful, form of aid during our time was what we called the ambassador's self-help fund. This was a fund that was allotted by AID to the ambassador and his AID assistant, in relatively small quantities. I think something like $20,000 a year, up to say $200,000 a year. And these could be spent virtually without reference to the Department on self-help projects like digging wells, or erecting a school house, or providing toilets. Anything that was manageable within a small village, without all this fodderall of feasibility studies, and prior clearance with the Department. We had to keep the Department informed, of course. But we got a lot more mileage out of those little projects, much more credit for them than we ever got for these big projects because by the time the big projects were finished sometimes they had been so long coming that the receiving government was cynical, and no longer appreciative, and sort of upset that it had taken so long.

Anyway, we had many, many conferences. At this time also...this was in the time of Johnson, and we had, as I recall, National Security meetings at a much lower level than the National Security Council, of course, but meetings of the various agencies involved in any particular country to discuss these AID projects, or any other projects. And as I recall, many, many meetings, meetings, meetings. As I remember my period in Washington at this time, it was a period of constant activity. I had at that time 18 countries that I was more or less responsible for, and each country had a National Day that it had a reception to. So you were kept quite busy going to those National Days, also the countries I had served in before, had National Days to which I was invited. So your nights were not your own, nor were your days your own. You were constantly on the go, and it was really a rat race in every sense of the word.

Apart from the work I did as Deputy Director of AF/W, or acting director as I was most of the time actually, I had a lot of other things that I had to do. I was asked to go on several

lecture trips for the Department as part of the Department's public relations with America. I remember going on a series of lectures in the associated mid-Florida colleges—Florida Presbyterian, Florida Southern, and Rollins, talking about African affairs. I also went out to Overland to brief the Peace Corps....the Peace Corps was engaged in fish farming, studying how to do fish farming for Africa. But I was to brief them on the countries that they were going to be going to. I went out to the University of Dubuque in Iowa to talk on African affairs.

And also, I was asked to attend a number of Foreign Service Institute courses such as one on stresses and strains in modern American society which was a course on urban development really at Penn State. And there was one on communist strategy I remember that I was asked to go to. And there was one on science, the scientific work of the government. These were all a couple of days here and there throughout the two years. So this was all on top of everything else I was doing, but it was a different sort of thing to do, and it was relaxing, although fatiguing, but relaxing in the sense that it kept me up with other items outside of Africa.

Also, I was asked to be chairman of the Foreign Service Club Committee which was a small committee trying to find a club for the Foreign Service. And eventually, long after I had left it, they did find a club which now exists across Virginia Avenue, I believe. One of the places we looked at, at that time, was what is now DACOR House, the DACOR Bacon House, while it was still Mrs. Bacon's residence. So there was a lot doing, and it was a very gratifying period.

There was a change while I was working in the Department. The areas were relocated. Nigeria was taken out of West African Affairs and became its own division really, as I recall, Sierra Leone and Liberia, and possibly Ghana as well. This was at a time when they started the Country Director process in the Department, where they had smaller units, and they upped the status of the Country Director, and the Country Director was really supposed to be the top man for the countries he handled right under the Assistant

Secretary instead of going through an Office Director. So I became the Country Director for what they called Central West African countries.

Q: Who was the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs at that time?

VAN OSS: At that time it was Joe Palmer. The first Assistant Secretary for African Affairs was Joe Satterthwaite, and Soapy Williams took his place in 1960. He was appointed by President Kennedy who told him that it was the most important job that he would assign anybody. And I must say that working with Soapy Williams was really a delight because he was a very strong man. He had his weaknesses, and his insensitivities, but he also had tremendous energy, and the African Bureau was never more in the limelight than it was under Soapy Williams. And we were never in higher repute in Africa than we were under Soapy Williams.

Q: He came to your African post?

VAN OSS: He came to Uganda, that's right. And he came to Brazzaville. I've forgotten what I said about that, but he was indefatigable, and he insisted on speaking French even though his French was atrocious, but he spoke with courage and determination. And he fought for the African Bureau. He fought with AID to get money, and he fought with Congress. He fought with anybody that he had to to stand up for what he believed in. So I give him high marks because that was the peak of our effectiveness of our nation in Africa. And we were never in higher repute than we were at that time.

Joe Palmer, who took his place, was a different type. Joe Palmer had been really the first Foreign Service officer to work on African affairs, long before there was an African Bureau. He and people like Bill Witman, and Joe Satterthwaite probably, and one or two others. So there was never a better qualified person to have that post. Soapy Williams couldn't hold a candle to him in knowledge, and knowing what was going on in Africa. But Joe was a typical Foreign Service officer. He was very cautious, low key, he didn't believe in fighting. He believed in trying to get his way by reason, and soft spokenness. And as a

result he wasn't as effective in furthering the bureau's position, and a lot of the aid that we were successful in getting under Soapy Williams was held in abeyance during Joe Palmer's time. He was very nice to work with, a fine fellow, but I must say that he was not as effective a leader, or as effective a proponent of American interests as probably Soapy Williams.

As I've indicated, I spent the two years in the Department—or three years, I guess—and then moved on to the Senior Seminar.

In summarizing my Departmental experience, I can say that these three periods: the first period was one of anticipation of hard work, of buoyancy, wartime experience, and the immediate aftermath of the war, of being in on the ground floor in several intelligence type operations which the Department was carrying on. I was not assigned to OSS, or to CIA at any time although many people assumed that I was because the Biographic Information Division, which I headed, was eventually taken over by CIA, and was moved over there lock, stock and barrel. It became a computerized operation.

The second period was one of frustration, of being frustrated not only in what I was trying to do in the Department, but in the fact that you had to worry about justifying every act you took with the private sector and Congress. It was a much more integral part of life in America than the other two periods.

And the third period in the Department was really one of being happily engaged in the things I was the most interested in, African Affairs at that point, engaged in trying to make policy, and respond to events that were taking place with machine-gun like rapidity Africa.

And the one change that I could see in the Department was from a small, relatively manageable organization in the forties, to a hide-bound bureaucracy in the fifties. And then emerging into a fairly smooth running, but still bureaucratic, large organization which

had moved into the former Defense Department in its present headquarters, with the nice rooms on the eighth floor for entertaining foreign officials, and so on and so forth.

One thing I might mention too that is perhaps worth mentioning. One problem in our dealings with African countries is that one of the great treats for an African head of state, or Foreign Minister, is to be given a trip to the United States. If a head of state comes, its a very difficult proposition because you have to line up the President, and he expects to see the President. So given the fact that there are numerous states all over the world, and numerous heads of state who want to come. There were perhaps two or three African heads of state who were to come every year, and that was about all we could handle.

Foreign Ministers were another thing. There were dozens and dozens of Foreign Ministers, and each Foreign Minister of one of the countries that I was handling, would come to the United States fully anticipating meeting his opposite number, namely the Secretary of State. And the Secretary of State is faced with Foreign Ministers from practically every country in the world at one point or another. So its very difficult. There's well over 200 at least. Some of them leave office and then their successors come, etc. So it was very difficult to line up the Secretary. Rusk was very good about it, and I suppose I've been into his office two dozen times in the three years that I was involved in this sort of thing. But when he couldn't do it, it was Soapy Williams, or Joe Palmer was always available, but this was an Assistant Secretary of State meeting the Foreign Minister. He's the most important officer that Foreign Minister had to see because he was the one that determined what would happen to that country. But the Foreign Minister wanted to see his colleague, and if he couldn't see the Secretary of State, he wanted to see somebody of equal, or almost equal status. I think I got in to see Under Secretary Ball once. And I got in to see Joe Sisco once.

And then old Averell Harriman was the one that we could always count on. He was the grand old man of American foreign policy. He had been in high echelons longer than any other man. He had pictures on his wall of everybody from Franklin Delano Roosevelt down

to the present time. Every leader, every leader abroad, etc. And he was very good about it. He grumbled, and he would say, “Oh, Hank, I don't want to see him. I've got to worry about Vietnam.” And then I'd say, “I know, but you've been so good about it, and darn it you're the only one of sufficient stature that we can find, and this fellow is going to be upset if he doesn't see somebody like you.” So he'd say, “All right, bring him in.” And I would.

That was something that was very difficult to arrange, strangely enough. Well, not strange. All of our high officers have a lot of things to do. But to the Foreign Minister of Togo, he wanted to see his colleague, or the acting colleague, and anything far short of that was not acceptable. And that's one of the problems that still exist, I would think.

Continuation of interview: October 3, November 14, 1991

Q: This is an oral interview with Hendrik Van Oss. It is October 3, 1991. Mr. Van Oss will be speaking to us today about his tour as DCM in Brazzaville which began in September, 1962. Mr. Van Oss.

VAN OSS: As you may recall from previous tapes, I left Uganda in mid-September, 1962, flew across the continent and arrived eventually in Brazzaville on the 26th of September. The contrast between East and West Africa is something that I think I might talk a little bit about.

East Africa was always one of my favorites. I enjoyed it immensely, it was a beautiful part of the world...green, relatively salubrious climate, not too hot, especially not in Kampala, mountains, lovely scenery, etc. Plus the very important fact that everybody spoke English out there.

Brazzaville was in what used to be the middle Congo, or part of the French Equatorial African empire, if you want to call it that, where they all speak French. My French was very, very rusty. I hadn't spoken it since Saigon (1950). While I could read it quite easily,

I found it difficult to express myself fluently and the sound barrier was very difficult to overcome.

Also the contrast in the general climate was marked. In West Africa the climate is very hot and humid. Most of the land is flat with brownish hills in the far distance but not nearly as striking as the landscape in East Africa. So West Africa from that standpoint in my mind couldn't hold a candle to the East.

From the standpoint of politics, however, I think the West could hold its own and probably was every bit as interesting, if not more so, than East Africa. In Congo/Brazzaville, the leader in 1962 was a semi-defrocked priest named Abbe Fulbert Youlou, who had been eased out of the priesthood by reason of excessive drinking and probably also a bit of womanizing. In any event he had become the leader of one of the main parties in that part of the world and after the French granted the countries of Equatorial Africa their independence he eventually consolidated his power and defeated his nearest rivals. He was firmly in control of the Congo when I arrived there.

My ambassador was Wendell Blancke and I must say a few words about him because he was one of the great characters of the Foreign Service. He was a rather short, portly man who looked very much like Robert Benchley...a little mustache and a jovial twinkle in his eye. He was well educated and very bright. He had been a commercial artist so his interests ran into art, music, poetry. He was, of course, also interested in politics. He was a good administrator and great for the morale of the post. In fact I have never served under an ambassador who had more concern over the well-being and general happiness of his staff. He was very amusing, had a good sense of humor, was a great punster and cartoonist. At conferences, he never paid much attention to the substance of what was going on, but he paid a great deal of attention to the actual words uttered and whenever a word roused a thought in his mind, he would draw a quick cartoon. Some of his drawings were published in the Foreign Affairs Journal. He was noted throughout the Service for his wit.

He also was an accomplished doggerel poet and one of his most famous poems was the “Ballad of the Butt”, an epic on the role of the cigarette in Germany right after World War II. I have a copy of that. When one of the staff would leave post, Wendell always composed a long poem making nice gentle fun of him; something the person could take with him or her as a memento. So I had great affection for him and enjoyed working under him.

As an ambassador he was effective in many unusual ways. He translated “Le Congolese”, the national anthem of the Congo into English, wrote it out on parchment of some sort and presented it to the Congolese government. He carried a replica of the U.S. Seal on a wooden plaque and hung it in the Embassy. Those were the sorts of thing he liked to do.

He was, however, and this was perhaps his one weak point, very nervous. When he would stand around he was always shuffling his feet and in constant motion. When he had to go over to the Congolese Foreign Office he would almost have a crisis of nerves anticipating the visit, worrying about how he would express himself exactly and what he would say. Such concern was unnecessary because he was perfectly fluent in French and certainly knew how to express himself well. Although he was not all that articulate, he was a very good draftsman.

He had been Consul General in Frankfurt and his background was mostly in German areas, although he had also served in Hanoi at the time I was in Saigon in 1950. So I had known him a long time. He was a old friend. He did his best to make up to me for the fact that I had left my beloved Uganda and had arrived in this “unknown” territory.

I think my period in Congo/Brazzaville can be divided into two parts. The first part was the first eight months or so between the time we arrived in late September and the time we left to go on home leave. Then there was a coup d'etat and I came back from home leave to find a new government in place. The second part is what happened to us after that time.

In the Abbe Fulbert Youlou period, frankly, I didn't have enough to do. I wasn't bored exactly, but I certainly was not working my head off the way I had in Kampala. I was busy trying to learn French. I had a series of French teachers. Most of them were young ladies who didn't know anything about teaching, but that was all right, I listened and tried to talk.

There wasn't much of substance to report under Abbe Youlou. Much of our time was taken up with protocol. Every time Youlou left the country the whole diplomatic corps, or at least the top officers, would have to go out en masse to the airport to see him off. The ambassadors would line up in order of seniority based on length of time at post with their deputies standing next to them. Then the worthy Abbe would arrive in his limousine and he would gravely walk past the ambassadors shaking hands with every one of them as if he were about to depart for years of exile or something like that. And then when he returned the same thing would happen.

Q: That was at the request of the government?

VAN OSS: Oh, yes. It was mandated.

Q: Had you seen that in any other country?

VAN OSS: I was not aware of it, no. Once in a while we used to go out to meet somebody in the home government if there was a reason to do so, but in the Congo every time the president made a move he wanted his diplomatic corps to dance attendance, and we did. He was always impeccably dressed in a cassock. He had many cassocks of many colors and it was one of our little games to wager which color he would use for this or that occasion. His cassocks were green, red, maroon, white, etc.

I might also mention that whenever we had to go over to the Foreign Office or to see the president, we would be received in the morning and would be presented with glasses of champagne. The president would join us in drinking champagne. This was not always conducive to an efficient way of getting across whatever message we had to deliver or

receiving whatever he had to impart. But really there was nothing worth mentioning about the first period that I can think of at the moment except for atmospherics.

I might go into that a little bit. Brazzaville is right across the Congo (now Zaire) River from Leopoldville (now Kinshasa), about a twenty minute ferry ride. When I arrived in September, the Belgian Congo across the river, which had been in turmoil, if you recall, from about 1960 on, was beginning to settle down a little bit. The main worry was whether Katanga was going to secede or not. Eventually there was, I think in December, a meeting of the Pan African Freedom Movement for East, Central and South Africa at which all of the leaders of the newly independent African countries assembled and at which we, the American government, tried to get African support for whatever action we were planning to take through the UN to keep Katanga from seceding.

Q: Katanga was where most of the copper was.

VAN OSS: Yes and a man by the name of Tshombe was in charge of that province. He wanted Katanga to secede from the ex-Belgian Congo. He had close allies within Belgium. Katanga was the richest part of the Belgian Congo.

In any event, this conference took place and I was seconded to attend because I knew some of the leaders from East Africa. It was a very successful conference and the Africans supported our efforts to keep the Belgian Congo, or what is now Zaire, from splitting apart.

While the Belgian Congo had been in turmoil, it was settling down, but there still wasn't much in their stores. Our Leopoldville colleagues considered Congo/Brazzaville to be the “big PX”. They used to come over weekly to get supplies from Brazzaville. And there weren't all that many supplies in Brazzaville, if I recall correctly, but they were more easily available than over in Leopoldville.

We had quite a bit of toing and froing. Ed Gullion, under whom I had served in Saigon, was our Ambassador in Leopoldville. He used to come over to see us and would invite us over

to see him, etc. We had a system of what we called “squawk boxes” or two-way radios in the houses of the main officers in Brazzaville and Leopoldville. The idea was that if there was an emergency we would be able to communicate directly with each other. Of course it was a little embarrassing because these things were kept on all the time. I remember we had our small children with us in Brazzaville and our radio was in our bedroom. One time our nine year old second son was pestering our seven year old daughter and she was doing her usual screaming, “Stop it! Stop it!” at the top of her lungs. Finally somebody from across the river in Leopoldville said, “For God's sake, tell them to stop it and leave us in peace.”

Also we had several demonstrations at one time or another over on our side during which we kept in touch with Leopoldville by squawk box. We had a system of codes. The “quarter deck,” I think was my place; the “bridge,” was the Ambassador's residence, etc. I remember one of these demonstrations started at the crack of dawn, about 5 AM. I was up at that time and duly reported over the radio: “Quarter Deck calling Bridge, crowd is assembling in Poto Poto (the African section of Brazzaville) and beginning to move towards the city,” etc., feeling very much like a correspondent right on the scene of some great occurrence. Later, Ed Gullion's wife from across the river said to me, “For goodness sake, Hank, can't you get these things started a little bit later? Every time you report something at 5 AM you wake us up and then nothing happens.” So we had to be a little careful how we used this modern mechanism.

The radios were all above board and everybody knew we had them. It was not a secret communication by any means, but we tried to mask who was talking by using these silly code names.

In any event, nothing much happened really from the time we arrived in September to the time we were sent home on leave in April. It was a long leave because I was seconded to the counterinsurgency course that all officers had to take at that time over at the Foreign Service Institute. This was one of Bobby Kennedy's pet projects. He felt that we should

all know about revolutions, counter-revolutions and that sort of thing. And it was a useful course, I guess.

In the meantime there was a coup d'etat in Brazzaville (in August, I believe) and I had to cut what was left of my leave short, and hurry back. What happened was that there had been some sort of a labor dispute. A crowd of several hundred people had gathered outside the presidential palace. To make a long story short, Abbe Fulbert Youlou on seeing the demonstrators lost his nerve and resigned on the spot. A man named Massamba-Debat, took his place. The event was an eye opener to me because it made me realize that any person or group that could get together several hundred armed people all with one aim in mind could really take over almost any one of the governments in this part of the world. This is perhaps an exaggeration, but it certainly happened that way in Congo/Brazzaville.

Massamba-Debat had been a rather liberal minister in the Youlou cabinet. He seemed quite friendly to the United States. We were not overly concerned by the course of events because none of us were really great admirers of Youlou. However, it quickly became quite clear that there were forces behind the scenes quite a bit more significant and more malevolent then had appeared to be the case when the takeover first happened. And, indeed, as things developed over the next year or so it turned out that this little country was becoming really the first truly Marxist government in Africa. Behind the scenes there was what they called a National Revolutionary Council, which was composed of a dozen or so Marxists who were very clever. They kept their heads down for a long time. It was not apparent from the beginning what was taking place. It was only gradually noticeable that officials were no longer as friendly to us as they had been before. We thought at first it was because we didn't recognize the new government right away. (It took close to five or six months before we formally recognized it.) That may have started the ball rolling down hill so far as we were concerned, although I think the dynamics of the situation were such

that we would have been in essentially the same position no matter what we might have done from the beginning.

To get back to my return after leave, I left the U.S. on a plane which also carried a Congolese named Charles David Ganao, who turned out to be the newly appointed Foreign Minister in the new government that had just been established. I am not sure I made it clear that the revolution happened while I was on leave and I returned as soon as I was able to secure air passage but didn't actually arrive in Brazzaville until several days afterwards...mid-August or August 20, something like that. The coup, as I recall, took place on August 15. Charles David Ganao was a young man who had been a friend of our USIS librarian who had recommended him for a Leader Grant, which accounted for his being in the United States. I was introduced to him on the plane. He and I chatted. I remember him saying with a very serious expression, “Oh, this is a very difficult position I am going back to.” He obviously was very apprehensive as to what he was getting into. He had just been a minor official up to that point, but apparently he was known favorably by the people who had instigated the coup.

Another thing of interest is that while Ganao was in America he had formed a relationship with the daughter of an American taxi driver and, indeed, later on while he was in office brought her over to Brazzaville, installed her in his apartment and eventually married her. He was a young man then, certainly not over 40 and probably in his mid-30s. And seemed a very nice chap. I was quite taken with him on the plane. But that didn't last very long as you shall see.

It is hard to go back and remember just how and why things went to pieces, but they did. When Wendell Blancke left...transferred to the Department where he was to serve as an inspector...in December, I was very upset at the fact that nobody from the Foreign Office or any part of the Congolese government came to see him off. Indeed, one of their ministers was out at the airport meeting somebody else and I said to him, “Our Ambassador is leaving, wouldn't you like to say goodby to him?” He pulled back

immediately, visibly shaken, and said, “Well, no, no, that is up to someone in the Foreign Office. That is not in my bailiwick.” I said, “It seems very strange after all the friends Ambassador Blancke has made here and after translating your national anthem, etc. that nobody should be here to say goodby to him.” Then I turned on my heel and left. A few minutes later somebody scurried up, a functionary named Bernard Kolelas who had filled the role of protocol officer in the Foreign Office and who happened to be in the airport at the time. He realized that probably somebody should say goodby on behalf of the Congolese government, so he went into the plane and shook Wendell's hand, thus making his departure a little less stark.

But things kept getting worse. Up to this time a Chinese Ambassador from Taiwan had been assigned to Brazzaville, a scholarly diplomat named Sampson C. Shen, a very good friend and nice chap. Soon after the revolution, representatives from Czechoslovakia, Ghana, and other less friendly parts of the world appeared in Brazzaville. The Ghanaian Ambassador was particularly obnoxious. He was anti-American and took great joy in baiting us. Sampson Shen, of course, was in a very vulnerable position because the Government of France had eventually recognized Communist China. Here was Brazzaville with a Nationalist Chinese Ambassador still in place. So the handwriting was on the wall. I remember spending many hours with Ambassador Shen, (this was after Ambassador Blancke had left and I was Charg#) trying to figure out ways of postponing his departure, and forestalling what really was inevitable.

And, of course, eventually the Congolese did withdraw their recognition of Nationalist China and Communist Chinese diplomats arrived in Brazzaville. In those days we were under instructions from the Department that we should not have anything to do with the Communist Chinese representatives. We were not to socialize with them and to ignore them to the extent possible. So my worthy Ghanaian colleague took great pains in putting the two of us, the Communist Chinese Ambassador and me, together at the same table or introducing us while we were standing at a cocktail party. Anything he could do to add to what he felt would be my discomfort. The Chinese Ambassador was just as embarrassed

as I and we both would duck and got pretty adept at staring into the distance and ignoring each other. I think we carried out our mutual instructions satisfactorily.

Youlou, as I recall, was jailed, eventually released and taken under the protective arm of the Catholic Church, which restored him to priestly or semi-priestly status.

The new government was headed by Massamba-Debat who had been Minister of Planning. He had also been president of the National Assembly. His new cabinet was made up largely of young technicians of whom Ganao was one. They announced, as I recall, that they were going to follow a policy of non-alignment, and eventually established relations with Communist China, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, etc. Israel, Chad, Central Africa Republic, Nationalist China maintained diplomatic relations and then eventually, Sampson Shen, the Chinese had to leave.

We couldn't put our finger on it, but we just knew that things were not going too well. First of all, Kolelas, who had been quite friendly to us and had been our main working contact in the Foreign Office, was suddenly kicked out or resigned and a man named Gomez took his place. I remember coming to the Foreign Office one day, hearing that Kolelas was no longer there, and innocently saying something to the effect that I was sorry to see Kolelas leave and hoped somebody would give him my regards and express my regret that we would no longer be working together. Then I was introduced to Gomez. Well, a few days later Foreign Minister Ganao called me in and read the riot act to me. He said, “You are interfering with our internal affairs.” I said, “I beg your pardon, in what way?” He said, “Well, I understand that you expressed your opinion on the resignation of Kolelas. This is not your affair and a highly improper thing to do.” I explained that we had worked with Kolelas, that I was not aware that he was in disfavor, and that I had sent my regards to him as a polite way of saying goodby. Ganao said, “Well it was a maladroit thing to do,” and grumpily dismissed me.

I didn't really understand why he got all heated up about this until several weeks later when we learned that Kolelas had fled across the river to Leopoldville, and was being accused by the Congolese of building up an opposition movement to the new revolutionary government. Of course, if I had known this before, I would have kept my mouth shut.

Then I recall another episode. Governor Averell Harriman visited Leopoldville, (now Kinshasa but I am going to use Leopoldville because that is what we called it then), and wanted to be briefed on Congo Brazzaville. We were summoned. I came over with the political officer, David McDonough, and we briefed Harriman. He asked me specific questions about the new government. I said I could see evidence of communist influences. I couldn't tell whether the individual members were card carrying communists or not, but this would ultimately come to light, and it seemed to me unmistakable that this was the way things seemed to be moving.

Well, a few days later, Harriman was widely quoted in the press as saying that the new Congolese government was communist backed. He minced no words about it. Whereupon I was summoned by Foreign Minister Ganao who said to me, “Do you think we are fools? Don't you think we know what you are up to?” I said, “I beg your pardon?” He said, “Yes, we know you went across the river to see Harriman. We know what you must have told him because we read the paper and can put two and two together.” I said, “Well, it wasn't like that at all. I told him what I thought was going on here,” etc. etc. Well, what could I say really? Obviously he had me, but I tried to say that Harriman's words might have been taken out of context, that things haven't been going well so far as we were concerned so maybe he was just expressing normal concern.

Eventually I got a letter from Harriman saying he hoped we had not been too embarrassed by what he had said. I had to say, “Well, not really, probably your words were good medicine for the Congolese.”

Anyway, our relations with the Congolese continued to go down hill. We began to get hints from the government that they thought the fact that we hadn't yet appointed a new ambassador meant we were about to withdraw recognition or take some unfriendly action against them. So I began to try to spur the Department into getting an ambassador in place, because I felt our only hope of changing the bad tide that seemed to be running out for us was to appoint a new ambassador, try to change the psychological outlook and rebuild the friendly relations we had enjoyed under our former ambassador.

The Department was obviously working on the appointment of an ambassador and I think they may have speeded the process up a little bit on the basis of what I suggested. Henry (Barney) Koren was appointed. He was an old friend, a fellow Princetonian and Quadrangle Club member as well as a fellow swimmer and soccer player. I knew him from all of these areas. I had never worked with him before, but I welcomed his appointment. And, indeed, he was a very good choice. He spoke quite good French, not as well as Blancke, but pretty fluent. But he was an entirely different type. He was tall, about 6'4", angular, rather solemn looking-Abe Lincolnesque. He wasn't really grumpy but he had a deep growling voice. This was his first embassy. He had held important positions in the Department, had been attached to the Department of Defense at a high level and may have had OSS connections before that.

He wanted to run a tight ship. Of course, Wendell Blancke ran a very loose ship, so it took a little bit of doing to get our people used to the fact that we now had a person who knew what he wanted and wanted whatever he wanted right away.

At the same time, a few days after Koren arrived, Mennen (Soapy) Williams, Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, arrived on a goodwill tour. He was to be the other shell in our double-barreled shotgun approach. The Ambassador was to beef up the Embassy and restore the psychological atmosphere and Soapy was to bolster him and his position. They worked in tandem very effectively. All the government officials they saw were very agreeable and friendly. I remember Soapy Williams going back in the car with Ambassador

Koren and saying, “Well, you see it is just a question of personality and personal relations.” I said, “Well, Governor, that may be true and I hope it is true, but I can assure you that I think it is going to take a little bit more than personality to turn this thing around.”

For a brief period after Governor Williams left, Ambassador Koren enjoyed a short honeymoon. Things looked a little bit better. Then one night I heard some hullabaloo over the squawk box. I gathered that our administrative officer was down by the dock. The Embassy had its own boat, a large motor boat that we used to ferry things across the river, something we continued to do without thinking about it too much. But on hearing this hullabaloo in the middle of the night, I went down to where the noise came from and found Marty Bowe, our administrative officer, trying to screw a spot light onto the top of our boat. What had happened was that some people from the British Embassy in Leopoldville had been out in a small boat which had malfunctioned in some way and had been swept down stream. The British Embassy was very concerned about them and asked us if we would take our large motor launch out on the river and see if we could find these people. I asked whether Marty had checked this out with the Congolese police, which indeed he had, so I gave my authorization to go ahead.

Well all this took a lot of talking back and forth across the river and pretty soon the Ambassador's car drove up with Barney Koren, the Ambassador himself, driving it. He had heard all of the noise and had come over to see what was going on. He also had some misgivings, but eventually sanctioned our decision and the boat went out. With him, I might add, was the British Ambassador in Brazzaville.

Well, no sooner had they returned home, (I was not in on this but I heard about it later) there was a knock on their door. There stood Foreign Minister Ganao and another member of the Foreign Office, furious. They had heard all the noise too and knew what was going on. Ganao said to the Ambassador, “Don't you realize that the Congo River is a border between two countries and that you can't just cross the border and go back and forth without permission?” The Ambassador said, quite politely, “We thought we had

permission. We had gone through the police." Ganao said, "No, this is not a matter for police jurisdiction. This is a matter for the Foreign Office." So they were quite upset. The Ambassador calmed them down a bit.

This was the first sour note the Ambassador had encountered since he arrived. Various other things happened that I don't really recall which kept things sliding down hill.

But the really big revelation occurred on the occasion of the first anniversary of the revolution of August 15, when the government held a parade and celebration in the stadium in Brazzaville. We were invited along with all the other diplomats. We came to our seats and noticed that Massamba-Debat was already sitting down with his entire cabinet. At the last moment in walked six or eight men with the unmistakable air of power combined with fake humility that communist officials adopt. I have seen it in China and in Russia. Each one wore a simple khaki uniform and a cap with a single red star in front. They took their places in a special section right in front of the president. They were obviously the Revolutionary Council, or politburo.

We had heard rumors that there was such an organization...I think they called themselves "revolutionary council"...but this was the first actual time we had seen for ourselves that such an outfit existed. Each of these men seemed very self-conscious, carried himself with dignity, even while sitting down.

Well, Massamba-Debat got up and made a few of the usual remarks and then said, "But I have something much more important to report to you. We have had a present from somebody. What was this present? Was it a box of chocolates? Was it this or that? No, I will show you what it was." At that point a flat top truck pulled out into the stadium and rolled in front of the assembled masses. I suppose there were 20,000-30,000 people there. On the top of this truck were a whole bunch of weapons...guns, machine guns, etc. And then, very conspicuously displayed right alongside these weapons were some cardboard boxes with the USAID symbol of clasped hands and the US flag on them. We could hear

the crowd saying, “Les Etats Unis! Oh, Oh,” and muttering. Then Massamba-Debat went on to say that these weapons had been smuggled into the country from across the river; that this was a present from those whom they had considered their friends, and more to the same effect. Then he calmed the crowd by saying, “But we must be mature. We must not react too harshly to something like this. We must handle ourselves like the civilized people we are.”

At that point we realized that this was perhaps the clearest indication yet as to the way the political scene was developing.

I have to go back a little to say that I had been informed a month or so before this that I was going to be transferred to the Department. My successor, Mike Rives had already arrived in Brazzaville. He was with us as we witnessed this event in the stadium.

Later, Mike and I went around to pay my farewell calls and to introduce him to the various people I had known in the government. When we called on Mr. Gomez, our contact in the Foreign Office, by prearrangement with Mike I decided as a parting gesture to indicate to the Congolese that recent events had not passed unnoticed. I did this, not in an angry way, but as an expression of my concern over the way I thought the relationship between our two countries seemed to be developing; wondering if, indeed, we were headed for a rocky period. I mentioned five or six occurrences, including those mentioned on this tape, as well as various other disturbing episodes which I can't recall. I had prepared my remarks quite thoroughly and had my facts pretty well in hand. I was completely unemotional except to the extent of expressing concern. Mike didn't say anything because he had to keep the relationship going. Whatever they thought of me was no longer of importance since I was leaving.

Gomez' only reply was, “These things are all separate events. They don't have any connection with each other. There is no trend, no plot, etc.” But, indeed, I think there was. And as events eventually turned out things certainly did continue to go down hill and

eventually in February of the following year Barney Koren was withdrawn. His mission had failed and we closed our Embassy. It remained shut for about a dozen years.

Q: You mentioned a little bit of geography, the difference between the east coast and the west coast of Africa, did you notice a difference in the people as well?

VAN OSS: Well, yes, in the people we dealt with. If you mean the people out in the countryside, the villagers, etc., there were differences but not significant differences. The differences were differences in the different cultures.

Addressing the first, the differences in officials with whom we dealt with. The most noteworthy difference is of course the language. The people I dealt with in Uganda all spoke fluent English and we could understand each other thoroughly. The people I dealt with in Brazzaville all spoke French. My French was at a 3 working level only, so it was difficult to get established on the same footing of trust and understanding I had enjoyed in Uganda.

Further, other differences could be attributed to the French as opposed to the British colonial background. The Congolese were African Frenchmen more or less, and the Ugandans were African Englishmen.

Q: Was there an apparent difference in their education? Had the two colonial powers educated their people differently?

VAN OSS: Remember that Uganda had roughly 10 million people and the Congo had fewer than one million people. Having said that, I think on the primary school level, probably the French educated a higher percentage of the child population than the British. It was easier to do that because there were fewer to begin with. But the British had a flourishing university (Makerere) in Kampala and the French, as I recall, had a training school in Brazzaville that went through the first two years of college. I would say that the

education of the Congolese was about as high as any of the French Equatorial Africa countries, probably higher.

The Congolese were considered to be the most advanced group in that part of Africa. In Gabon, for example, many of the technical positions were held by Congolese. Just before I arrived in the Congo there had been a big blowup between the Congo and Gabon, all based on a soccer match, which the Congolese team had won in Gabon. Congo's players had bottles thrown at them when they left the field. Whereupon the Congolese in Pointe Noire rampaged against Gabonese nationals there and severely beat some of them. Whereupon the government of Gabon evicted all Congolese from Gabon. In doing so the Gabonese almost wrecked their economy because they had kicked out the people who were the most technically advanced and educated, and who held the most skilled jobs.

In the countryside, going to the second part of your question, I would say that the Ugandan tribes were generally head and shoulders more advanced than some of the tribes in the Congo. The main tribe in the Congo, the Bakongo, were quite far advanced and not far behind the Baganda, for example, but the Bateke, a tribe of about 150,000 north of Brazzaville were still quite primitive.

I remember going to the main Bateke village on two occasions. The first was during a national celebration of Brazza's conquest, or something of that sort. King Makoko of the Bateke was there running things. He was dressed in a red cloak, one eye was painted white and the other red. He had a sparse fringed beard. He would talk to his people like a cheer leader. He would say something and then the crowd would chant in response. Then he would say it again and the crowd would respond again. The atmosphere was rather primitive, if I can use that expression.

The second time I went there was at the death of one of Makoko's wives, maybe his main wife. Ambassador Blancke and I went up. The roads were terrible...sand and mud. We arrived in the midst of a keening and howling of the remaining wives over the coffin of

the dead wife, and we were ushered into the presence of Makoko in a large hut. He was sitting on a “throne” with a number of young wives clustered about his feet. There were two figures, one on each side of the so-called throne, an old man and an old woman. To this day I don't know if those two were mummified or whether they were alive, because they did not move a muscle. They did not blink an eye or even seem to breathe. They sat motionless for the half hour or so that we were in the royal presence.

Q: And they may have sat there through the whole funeral.

VAN OSS: They may have indeed, if they were alive. If they weren't alive, they were remarkably well preserved corpses.The Bateke were a relatively primitive tribe and kept their customs pretty much throughout the period we were there.

Q: So you didn't travel much up country or into other areas very frequently?

VAN OSS: It was very difficult. You could only go in one direction for about forty miles or so outside Brazzaville and that was towards Pointe Noire. There was a navigable road all the way out to the coast. But going north, the roads became nothing but tracks. I did take several trips. I took a trip by land rover with our military attach# (Col. Bridenbaugh) soon after I first got there. We drove north of Brazzaville, through Sibiti and M'Binda and into Gabon to Franceville. We were following a railroad track. Colonel Bridenbaugh was on an intelligence tour for the military, checking road conditions, measuring bridges, and so on. I went along to learn something about the countryside. We stayed with missionaries and in one or two so-called hotels.

Q: What were they like?

VAN OSS: They were just plain houses with a couple of rooms with beds in them. That was it. There would be a common bathroom.

The missionaries' lodgings were not bad, simple but comfortable and clean.

Then later on we took a flying trip. We had a military attach# and an air attach# in Brazzaville. The air attach# had a plane, a C-47. We flew in it up to a town in the north, the name of which I can't remember—I think it was near Imfondo—where there was a young American missionary couple. We visited them and were put up at their house...the whole crew and myself slept in one room. By pre-arrangement we allowed the pilot, Colonel Hensch, and his co-pilot Captain Watell, to have single beds since they were the ones who had to do the flying. I slept in a double bed with one of the crew.

Q: What about the missionaries when the new revolutionary government came in? Were they the object of any attention?

VAN OSS: Not really, so far as I am aware, not while I was there certainly. When we went up north to visit the missionaries we took some films with us. The missionary, a very nice young man, Gene Thomas, I think his name was, and his wife and children were there. He was on good terms with the local officials. We had to discuss with the local political "commissar" what our films were going to be. We had to assure him that the films would not contain American "propaganda." One of our films was a personal hygiene documentary which showed people how to brush their teeth and that sort of thing. As I look back on it that strikes me as having been a little condescending. The other one was a film of Miriam Makeba, the famous South African singer. She was very popular. They loved that film. But the people were bored silly learning how to use a toothbrush. There were lots of people on hand. The screen was right out in the open. The missionary had his own generator and projector.

So far as I know our missionaries were never evicted or mistreated.

Q: You mentioned that our Embassy people in Leopoldville, for example, came across the river in 1963 to get provisions and supplies which were scarce in Leopoldville. After the revolutionary government came in was there any change in the availability of goods for the population?

VAN OSS: Yes. As I recall it became much harder to get things on our side of the river. In a sense, Leopoldville took on the role of PX. We used to get chickens and other foodstuffs there. But I don't recall any great change in the economic situation in the short time...you see I was there for only about a year after Youlou's downfall. I would say that in the beginning things did get hard to get. The prices were very high. But it seems to me that despite the fact that the new Congolese government became more and more Marxist as it went along, it still kept quite close ties with the French. French technicians remained in place, as I remember. I think a large number of the French superstructure of embassy and technical personnel stayed.

Now I don't recall what happened to the French military. There were some military airplanes there, and a detachment of French soldiers. I don't recall whether they stayed on or left. I think they left and reassembled probably in Gabon, and perhaps also in Chad and places like that. I know the French brought troops back into Chad later on when Chad had its trouble with Libya, and I know they brought troops into Gabon when there was an attempt to unseat M'Ba, then president of Gabon.

There really wasn't too much change in our personal lives between the two different time periods I was there. After the revolution, whenever we went out for a picnic, for example, or left Brazzaville, at some point or other we always would be stopped by a roadblock or by officials who would want to know who we were and what we were doing. There was much more of that sort of thing after the new government came into power.

But life in Brazzaville, itself, never changed much. It was quite pleasant. We had a swimming club, a tennis club, and a golf club. The French are very fierce competitors. In tennis one was ranked on a ladder and you were subjected to challenges from people below you on the ladder. I remember playing even more than I wanted to because challenges were constantly being issued. There was a golf course, which wasn't bad, except that the greens were really browns: there was no grass, it was all sand. When you were ready to putt one of the caddies would take a rake and a piece of board and smooth

out the sand in front of your ball so that it would have uninterrupted access to the cup. If you played your cards right, he would scoop a little channel in the middle of the cleared strip so that the ball would be guided into the cup.

Q: What was the housing like in Brazzaville?

VAN OSS: Housing was okay, but not great. Our house, the DCM's house, was very small when we first got there. The individual rooms were large, but there were just two bedrooms, a master bedroom for us and the other bedroom for our three kids. We closed off part of the hall, walled it in and made a third bedroom. Eventually another bathroom and bedroom were added. It was a pleasant modern house. Airy and light. The other people had houses of comparable size, but somewhat less modern than ours. The Embassy residence was a very unusual place. It was built in the shape of a ship, more or less. In the center of the living room there was a bar with a mast in the middle which led out to the flag pole on top of the building. There was a very large picture window with no glass in it which looked out over the Congo River flowing past. It was quite roomy, very pleasant and colorful. It was revamped and refurbished for the Korens after the Blanckes left.

Some of the people lived out beyond the golf course. The air attach#, Colonel Ed Hensch, had a pleasant house out in that neighborhood. He was a very nice, decent person.
He decided to raise turkeys, the idea being that he would turnover the establishment to some African friends after he left. He experimented with these turkeys. First, he filled a whole incubator with eggs, but misjudged the timing so the first batch he got were hard boiled eggs, rather than little turkeys. But eventually he had a couple of hundred all-white-feathered turkeys milling around in his yard. But alas, after he left the post and had turned the business over to his African friends, they ate all the turkeys and discontinued the breeding operation. So that was the end of that enterprise.

I would say that the housing was acceptable. It was not elaborate, but certainly acceptable.

One thing I think should be mentioned, we did do a certain amount of traveling among the countries of former French Equatorial Africa. Originally, right after World War II a single American ambassador was assigned to all of those countries...Gabon, Congo, Central African Republic, Chad. Then by fiat of Loy Henderson it was decreed that each country should have its own ambassador. But the air and military attach#s in Brazzaville were still assigned to all four of the FEA countries. So they would use the air attach# plane to travel from one place to another. Other Embassy personnel used to piggyback on those trips as much as they could.

I remember very vividly a trip we took to Chad in November, 1963. We were in Fort Lamy on Anne's and my wedding anniversary, November 22. This happened to be the day that President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. We were having dinner with my colleague, the DCM, Bob Redington, and somebody announced at the dinner that the President had been shot and was in bad shape. A little later the word came in that he had died. That put a tremendous cloud over everything. We tried to keep the social graces going, but it was impossible, it was just a sad occasion. Brewster Morris was our Ambassador in Chad at the time, but he was in the field on a camping trip some place and out of touch by radio. Somebody had to go out and get him. But in the meantime, Redington had to do everything that had to be done, put out a condolence book for officials to sign, etc. I felt that I should get back to my bailiwick to help do whatever had to be done there at the time. It was a very traumatic experience. I suppose all of us remember where we were when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor and where we were when Kennedy was assassinated.

Q: This is November 14, 1991. We are interviewing Hendrik Van Oss, a retired Foreign Service Officer. Hank, today we want to talk about periods of time you spent in the

Department of State. If you would just give us the dates that apply to the parts you are talking about that will help us to identify where we are.

VAN OSS: Well, I had three distinct periods in the Department of State. The first one was from the time I was first employed by the Department in June, 1942, running to 1948 with divisions I will go into when I describe that period. The second period was from 1957-59, including an extra year, 1959-60, when I took African Area Studies at the School for Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins. The third period was from 1964-67 and then back on another nine months or so when I attended the tenth Senior Seminar at the Foreign Service Institute.

Before I start describing each of these periods I want to make a general statement about the difference between serving in the field and serving in the Department. In the field, once one attains some degree of seniority, he or she becomes a fairly important member of a rather small group, one of a few American representatives in an embassy or consulate, and therefore a person of some importance, relatively speaking (in the area of assignment). He plays a part in anything that goes on. He meets important visitors from different parts of the world. He participates in any noteworthy event that takes place. So one tends to get illusions of grandeur.

When one is assigned to Washington, he is back in the State Department with several thousand fellow Americans including hundreds and hundreds of fellow officers and he is a mere cipher regardless of how high a position he holds, short of assistant secretary of State. One also finds that he can't do anything without prior clearance with six or twelve fellow officers in the Department of State. One also has to clear with colleagues in other Departments: Commerce, Treasury, sometimes Agriculture, CIA, Defense. So it takes a great amount of time to get messages out, or policy recommendations accepted.

Another thing about serving in the Department is that abroad one usually has free housing and a small pittance of representational allowance, plus diplomatic privileges in terms of

being able to buy inexpensive liquor and tax-free goods. In the Department you are just like any other American except that your salary is somewhat smaller...or at least it used to be in my day. This is a further humbling factor.

And finally, by way of general statement, the bureaucracy in the Department of State at the time that I served there, especially during the 1965-67 period, was extremely cumbersome. For example, if one had to prepare a report for the Secretary of State it had to be typed on pica typewriters and no page could have any erasures. Now this was, mind you, in the pre-wordprocessor days when typewriters were typewriters and human propensity to err was relatively high, and when the aides to the Secretary wanted everything letter perfect. I can remember several times staying at the Department until midnight trying to get a two-page memorandum typed up for the Secretary which would fit these severe pre-conditions. Not only were the conditions hard, but the African Bureau didn't have pica typewriters. We had to borrow them from the Secretary's Office or some typing pool in order to meet the requirements. Most of the typewriters in the Department were “elite” or whatever the non-pica print was called.

Having said that I will go back and start off with the first period in Washington. I came down to Washington early in the year 1942 to be interviewed in the Personnel Department. In those days the Personnel Department was in one large room in the Executive Office Building, which was then the old Department of State building. At one time I think State, Defense and Treasury were all in the same building. This is the building to the right of the White House as you are facing the White House. It really was a glorious building with large rooms and high ceilings. It was relatively cool in the pre-air conditioning era. There were swinging doors that didn't come down to the floor that allowed a breeze to waft through the offices and provided relief from the Washington humidity.

Being interviewed was a very peaceful process. I was sent over to the Department of Commerce, where the State Department had another section, the Division of World Trade Intelligence, and was interviewed by the personnel officer of that division (Norville

Sonnebeck). Then I went back up to New York where I was working for W. R. Grace and Company.

Q: So the whole of the Department of State was not, in 1942, in the old Executive Office Building. Was it scattered around Washington even at that time?

VAN OSS: Well, scattered is too strong a word because it wasn't all that large, but it was beginning to scatter, yes. The Division of World Trade Intelligence was in the Commerce Building mainly because a lot of the work had to be done in close conjunction with the Commercial Intelligence Unit of the Department of Commerce.

Anyway, I was “called” in June, 1942, came to Washington and moved in with four other Princetonians at 1527 “I” Street, NW, the Briar Inn. We lived in a basement apartment, which consisted of one large room with five beds plus a living room which led out to stairs up to the sidewalk. The building belonged to the United Mine Workers of America. If we were on the alert, while sitting in our living room, sometimes we could see the stubby legs of John L. Lewis, himself, passing above us on the sidewalk going to his headquarters around the corner. I think the United Mine Workers owned the whole block at that time.

The Briar Inn, itself, had been a house of ill repute in the past. It had been taken over by a landlady who put a lock on the door, evicted the professionals, and had taken in boarders. She had about two dozen rooms on the top five floors where FBI secretaries, etc. found a place to stay. And she had a cafeteria on the first floor, where we had many of our meals.

Anyway, Washington in those days was a very sleepy southern town. The general atmosphere was calm. The waitresses were all white and they all called us “honey,” which I thought rather endearing.

In the State Department, itself, there were, so far as I knew, no black or African-American officers at all; I was not aware of any African-Americans ranked higher than messenger.

Although the Division of World Trade Intelligence was indeed an intelligence outfit, it was part and parcel of the Department of State. Its job was to prepare the Proclaimed List of Blocked Nationals, a list of some 8,000 firms, mainly in Latin America, but also in the neutral countries of Europe, which had German or Japanese connections or were owned by German or Japanese concerns. I might say that the Germans and Japanese were extremely careful and clever at hiding and masking their ownership. So it took a great amount of research to dig out such connections. Our job was to read mail intercepts, newspapers, reports from Foreign Service auxiliary personnel, reports from the FBI, any source that we could find.

We had a very fine system of files in this pre-computer era. Intelligence work is largely a matter of filing information in a retrievable manner. If you don't have good files, you don't have good intelligence. Today you have computers, of course, but in those days there were no computers. Our filing system was set up by a fellow named Bill Irving and consisted of what was called a Chaindex and supporting folders. It was a system whereby the officers, of which I was at the lowest possible level, (P-1, $2,000 a year) would read reports, newspaper articles and the like, and mark pertinent portions with coded colors and symbols. These would give instructions to a staff of clerks who would then excise that item, make copies for cross reference purposes and file the items in the appropriate folders. The name of the company was included alphabetically and by country in the Chaindex, with certain symbols indicating immediately whether the company was on the proclaimed list or on the so-called confidential “watch” list, or whether it was being considered for such lists or whether it was clean.So you could, theoretically, take the Chaindex, flip through it and in two or three seconds have the name of the company, know at once where the file was, put your hand on the file almost immediately and have in front of you what you needed. Nothing special today, but in those days it was quite remarkable, if you think of the cumbersome British system with papers threaded on a piece of string through a hole tying together a whole wad of material. Ours was a very neat and efficient way of keeping track of information.

The Division of World Trade Intelligence had some very good people. John S. Dickey was the chief. He eventually became President of Dartmouth College. Francis Russell was his deputy and took over when Dickey was taken away to start what eventually became the State Department's Information and Cultural Exchange Division. Francis Russell eventually became ambassador to Israel, among other places. There were many others. George F. (Ben) Franklin later became executive director of Foreign Relations magazine and also Secretary to the Trilateral Commission. Tom Mann eventually became Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. Gordon Mein became ambassador to Guatemala and was shot and killed. John I. Howell, whom I will mention again, went from World Trade Intelligence into the OSS and eventually became President of the J.J. Schroeder Banking Company. Covey Oliver, became ambassador to one of the larger South American countries. Sy Rubin, Leo Cyr, Doug Heck and others all achieved distinction. This was out of a total group of about 30 officers. So I was basking in reflected glory from my colleagues in WT, and continued to do so all my career.

The filing system was so good, and so useful that Francis Russell had the idea of applying the system to the collecting of biographic information. He seconded Jack Howell and me to set this operation up. The two of us organized it, modeling it on the mother World Trade Intelligence system of information gathering and filing. We absorbed a unit that had been gathering biographic intelligence for the Latin American Bureau in the Department, and took over the Naval Intelligence biographic records, the Army equivalent, and eventually the OSS Biographic Records section, which was the largest of all. So that in 1945 or '46, the Division of Biographic Information (BI) was set up and I was made at that point Acting Chief. Douglas Heck, later ambassador to Niger and Nepal, was assistant chief. Jack Howell had been drafted and gone into the Army. They had tried to get a number of outside people to take the job of division chief, but for one reason or other they hadn't accepted it.

I spent two or three very happy years doing biographic intelligence work. We had a division of about 75 people. We had a very efficient system of collecting information and filing it. We could get a report on the Secretary's desk within minutes, if it was required. We prepared biographical reports on the foreign delegates for all the conferences. It was really a highly successful operation.

Some years later, after I had gone into the Foreign Service, the Hoover Commission made an investigation of the Department and came out with a very high commendation for this little unit. They said it had accomplished its mission, had done so effectively, and was a model of efficiency. Very nice words. I don't take credit for that, but I certainly was involved and was proud to have been involved.

In the spring of 1945 I took the first Foreign Service exams to be given after the end of World War II and passed them. I was actually inducted into the Foreign Service in early 1946. But I was asked to stay on at BI until they could find a successor. I did, staying on about two years longer. This whole biographic information operation was really a very gratifying experience. I was working with fine people; good, intelligent, highly trained specialists some of whom we had inherited from the OSS and others we had recruited ourselves.

I made two very interesting trips during that time. One to the Soviet Union with stop-offs at various European posts en route.

Q: When was that?

VAN OSS: That was in the summer and fall of 1946. It took about two months, I guess. My job was to set up biographic intelligence units in each of the embassies visited, mainly that in Moscow. This in essence meant establishing a collection and filing system and showing the people at the post what to collect and how to send the information back. We

had special multiple forms they were to use which they could file themselves with copies going to the Department for its own files. That was a vivid and interesting experience.

The next year I was sent to posts around the world starting in Japan, China, India, around the Middle East and coming out through Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. A marvelous opportunity. I helped organize biographic intelligence units at all posts visited.

End of interview